UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

MILANO

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN CRIMINOLOGIA

Ciclo XXXII

S.S.D: SPS/12

TRANSNATIONAL GANG MOVEMENTS

VIOLENT *PANDILLAS* IN MILAN

Presentata da: Dott. TOMMASO COMUNALE

Coordinatore Dottorato

Prof. Francesco Calderoni

Relatore

Dr. Marina Mancuso

Correlatore

Prof. Stefano Becucci

Anno Accademico 2018/2019

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Criminology

Candidate: TOMMASO COMUNALE

Supervisor: Dr. Marina Mancuso

Co-supervisor: Prof. Stefano Becucci

Academic Year 2018/2019

"Nothing... nothing... nothing...
he [the underboss] has taught those kids nothing,
he hasn't taught them what's the meaning of the clika,
the respect, he's never told them that
once in the MARA there is no way out."

[Phone intercept of a Mara Salvatrucha Leader.
Milan, April 2014]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I first decided to embark on the PhD journey, I was unaware of the challenges and unsure about what was lying ahead. My transition from graduate studies to true empirical research was not smooth nor linear. I just remember that at a certain point I felt to fully embrace my passion for criminology and take this path. Today, I can say that I am glad I did it.

Over the last three years, I have met and I have spoken with many brilliant and inspiring people. First, I would like to thank Professor Francesco Calderoni, for having shaped my way of thinking and working as a junior researcher. The work we have done on PROTON is remarkable; we cut no corners and this experience will serve as an example of commitment and teamwork for my professional career and future projects.

I am grateful to Professor Ernesto Ugo Savona and Dr. Lorenzo Bucossi and Dr. Vittorio La Torre of the *Polizia di Stato*, because of the interest shown in my research and the precious help in getting access to extensive judicial files on gangs in Milan. Without this data my thesis would not be the same.

To my supervisors Dr. Marina Mancuso and Professor Stefano Becucci, for having dedicated their time to my research and for their advices.

To Professor Frank Weerman and the folks at the NSCR. Our chats and talks on my beloved gangs pushed me towards the end at an even higher speed. I had a great time in Amsterdam, and I felt home even during tough rainy and cold days.

To the Eurogang community, because the workshops that I attended showed me the faces and human side of all the scholars whose works have accompanied me during these last three years. A group, a family, of truly inspiring people. As the motto says: *join Eurogang and see the world!*

I would like to thank all my colleagues at Transcrime; a special thanks goes to Serena, Alberto, Antonio, Cecilia, and Martina. It was hard at times to follow my never-ending talks, but I have always felt I could rely on you... possibly discussing about things over A beer.

To Alex and Gian, for the endless times we spoke about theory, data, ambitions and future plans.

To Silvia of the Casa de la Cultura Salvadoreña, because of her warm welcome in their community and for the afternoons we spent talking about my project.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, for the immeasurable support, attention, and comprehension they have demonstrated during this journey. This achievement is dedicated to all of you.

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ABSTRACT

In parts of Southern Europe, reports about crime and violence linked to Latin American gangs have increased over the past decade, yet few studies have assessed Latin gangs' criminal behavior in new contexts. With a focus on Milan, Italy, the proposed research aims to investigate the characteristics of transnational Latin American gangs in terms of gang formation, gang organization and activity, and gang criminal behavior. As part of the assessment, the present study examines: 1) the processes associated with Latin gang formation outside their context of origin, 2) gang organizational features and activities, and 3) gang members' involvement in co-offending crimes.

The research adopts a mixed-method approach comprising in-depth interviews with experts, and content analysis, social network analysis, and regression analysis of data extracted from five judicial/police files issued between 2005-2016. Results show that gang formation and gang joining are associated with individuals' search for identity and status. Gangs are mainly involved in group management activities, conflict, and violent crimes, and are hierarchically organized with formal rules and roles. Nonetheless, no evidence has emerged regarding their evolvement into organized criminal groups. Findings are compared across different types of gangs and implication for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Since the first half of the twenty first century, Italian cities as Genoa and Milan have experienced the appearance of Latin American gangs, whose street visibility and criminal activities have sparked media reports. Italian major news media outlets have increasingly used terms as 'gangs', 'baby-gang' or '*bande giovanili'* to refer to street groups composed mainly of youths. This terminology indicates what research has defined as a process of media social construction and criminalization of gangs (see Esbensen and Tusinski 2007; Thompson, Burns, and Young 2000), and—within a broader perspective—expresses the shift in the perception of youth street groups from social to deviant and/or criminal ones. With regard to Latin American gangs, their escalating offending behavior has also been reflected in recent police anti-gang operations and court cases (see Moyersoen 2016). Despite media attention and law enforcement responses to Latin American gangs in Italy, to date little criminological research has investigated gang formation, gang organizational structure and gang development of criminal behavior. In this regard, on the example of Latin gangs in Milan, the present study addresses the primary research question: *How do Latin street gangs form and evolve outside their context of origin?* To answer it, the investigation includes three related secondary research questions: 1) *What are the factors and processes associated with gang formation and gang joining?* 2) *What type of activities are gangs involved in and what organizational features do they have?* and 3) *What type of criminal behavior do gang members engage in, and can gangs be regarded as organized criminal groups?*

The research questions seek to fill the research gaps identified by the review of the literature. In particular, the study aims to advance criminological knowledge about transnational Latin gangs outside their context of origin by: identifying the factors relating to gangs' formation and gang joining (Objective 1), highlighting gang activities and gang organizational features (Objective 2), and assessing gangs' criminal behavior to reveal similarities and differences across gangs and between gangs and organized criminal groups (Objective 3).

The first chapter comprises contemporary frameworks in gang research, that is, key aspects discussed by scientific studies to understand gangs. Firstly, the review covers the academic debate over the definition of gangs and characteristics of gang membership.

Secondly, the study introduces the behavioral and organizational features of gangs commonly reported in the literature. Classical concepts as social cohesion and social learning are also discussed as meaningful theories to understand group dynamics. Thirdly, gangs are compared to organized criminal groups to assess the differences and similarities pointed out by recent studies.

The second chapter draws the attention on Latin American gangs and highlights their evolution through the review of their spread in Latin America and their growing involvement in violent crimes and illicit activities. The review covers relevant literature on Latin American gangs in Europe with important contributions about their presence in Spain (Barcelona and Madrid). With regard to Italy, the review addresses the appearance and criminal involvement of Latin American gangs in Milan (and Genoa), whose perception of their criminal nature to date have mostly been dependent on law enforcement reports and newspaper articles. The review concludes introducing the research problem.

The third chapter presents the objectives of the research as well as the research design. The chapter provides a detailed description of the data sources, methods, and the strengths and limitations of the different types of data. In particular, the case study of Latin gangs in Milan encompasses qualitative and quantitative methods, as: 1) thematic analysis of interview transcripts; 2) qualitative and quantitative content analysis of intercepted conversations, and social network analysis and regression analysis of co-offending data extracted from police reports and judicial files issued between 2005 and 2016.

The fourth chapter presents the results reporting the research findings. The first paragraph provides details on the factors associated with gang formation as emerged from the thematic analysis. The first paragraph also includes results of gang organizational features and activities deriving from content analysis of intercepted conversations. The second paragraph comprises results on quantitative analyses on gang co-offending events, namely: features of gang co-offending networks, and characteristics of gangs and gang members involved in co-offending.

The fifth chapter discusses research findings in light of previous literature, devoting one paragraph to each main aspect of the study: gang formation and gang identity, gang activity and gang organization, and gang criminal involvement. The subsequent paragraph discusses gang organizational and criminal features to highlight the

development of gang involvement in co-offending and the extent to which Latin gangs in Milan resemble or have evolved into forms of organized criminal groups.

The final chapter concludes by reviewing the main results and points out the contribution and relevance of the first in-depth criminological investigation of transnational Latin gangs in Milan. Implications for future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER 1 CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORKS IN GANG RESEARCH

Over the last century, criminologists have studied youth street gangs[1] to identify the socio-economic and psychological factors underlying gang formation and youth group dynamics. This field of study has been mostly predominant in the U.S. since Thrasher's (1927) study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago. However, in the last two decades a growing body of international comparative research has also emerged (Decker and Weerman 2005; Esbensen and Maxson 2012; Klein et al. 2001; Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008). Since the early 2000s, the increasing number of gang studies outside the U.S. context has shaped what Pyrooz and Mitchell (2015, 40)—in a recent systematic review of gang research—have named the *International turn era*.[2] In order to better understand youth street gangs and their peculiarities, this chapter discusses key aspects related with definition of gangs and gang membership, behavioral and organizational features of gangs, and gangs as organized crime groups.

1.1 Defining 'gangs' and 'gang membership'

American researchers have debated definitions of gang and gang membership since they first began to investigate the characteristics of gangs. Reaching consensus on a definition is not only important for comparative research, but also for an accurate estimation of the extent of the gang problem, which affects policy decisions and public concern (Esbensen et al. 2001). Delinquent behavior and criminal involvement are

[1] For the aim of this study, the review of the literature covers youth street gangs. The review excludes prison gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs, terrorist groups and other youth groups (e.g. group in schools) who occasionally gather and commit delinquent activities, with the exception of Italy where much of the research has focused on deviant youth groups. The exclusion of the above types of gangs is in line with the work of Klein and Maxson (1996, 1) on gang structures and crime patterns.

[2] The evolution of gang research has been grouped into five eras. 1) The *Classic era* lasted until the 1950s and comprises the works of Thrasher (1927), Whyte (1943), and the contribution of the Chicago School on social disorganization theory. 2) The *Golden era* was characterized by important theoretical and empirical advancements in the field of delinquency, i.e. opportunity theory and subcultural theories. 3) The *Social problems era* began in the 1960s and identified a period during which gang violence and crimes resulted in a greater attention on gangs posed by the criminal justice system. 4) The *Empirical turn* has been characterized by longitudinal studies; it began in the 1980s and still occur today. Lastly, 5) the *International turn* era comprises the last two decades and refers to the study of gangs outside the U.S. For a thorough description of these eras, see Pyrooz and Mitchell (2015, 41–43).

perhaps the most discussed attributes in the literature, since researchers have been disagreeing on whether they are a defining feature of gangs (see Curry 2015). Some scholars have followed the approach of not including criminal behavior (Bjerregaard 2002; Short 1996; Queirolo Palmas 2010), while others have considered it to be a crucial defining aspect of gangs (see Weerman et al. 2009).

Thrasher (1927) provided one of the first definitions of gangs. Focusing on the link between urban geography and gangs, he identified three crucial aspects involved in gang formation and organization: 1) the interstitial nature of gangs (i.e. they populate socially marginal urban areas), 2) the spontaneous emergence of gangs, and 3) the fact that gangs evolve through conflict with other groups. On the one hand, Thrasher's definition has evolved as one of the most durable, and his study is widely perceived as groundbreaking for the study of street groups. On the other hand, his definition lacks 'criminal activity' as a key feature of contemporary definitions of gangs (Esbensen et al. 2001). This gap was subsequently addressed by scholars who studied the processes leading to the formation of gangs through the relationship between socially disorganized neighborhoods and delinquent subcultures (A. K. Cohen 1955; Spergel 1964). In this regard, Klein's (1971) work represents an important contribution, as it combines gang definition, gang membership and delinquent behavior through the application of the so-called self-definition method. Klein highlights that a youth group is perceived as a distinct aggregation by the community, gang members identify themselves as part of a group with a name, and gang members are persistently responsible for delinquent incidents occurring in the neighborhood (see also Curry and Decker 1998). This conceptualization promises comprehensive insights into the lives of gang members, gang culture, and the role of violence in gang settings (Huff 1997). According to some scholars, however, Klein's concept fails to explain the difference between gangs and subcultures because it highlights aspects that are inherent to both (Ball and Curry 1995; Miller 1973). Likewise, Bjerregaard (2002) argued that it is not desirable nor necessary to include criminal involvement as a defining feature of gangs. In line with Bjerregaard, Short's (1996) definition does not include any form of criminal behavior. According to Short, gangs are identified by the regularity of group meetings and continuity over time, and for being non-adult and self-determining groups.[3] Despite some disagreement on the inclusion of

[3] For a comprehensive review on definitions of gang, see (Curry 2015).

criminal behavior in the definition of gangs, the present study supports the view that considers criminal activity as a crucial defining feature of street gangs. The reason is twofold: this empirical research is a criminological inquiry and therefore offending behavior is a central aspect of the investigation; criminal activity is a defining feature of the Eurogang[4] definition, which has reached consensus after years of debate (Haymoz, Maxson, and Killias 2013; Matsuda, Esbensen, and Carson 2012). In fact, while some researchers have pointed out that the Eurogang definition may be too inclusive (Aldridge, Medina-Ariza, and Ralphs 2012), the majority has adopted the definition as it is "broad enough to capture gangs in their various forms across settings and historical periods, while also exclusive enough to remove other deviant or unconventional collectives" (Pyrooz and Mitchell 2015, 55). For these reasons, this research adopts the Eurogang definition. As per the Eurogang definition (Klein and Maxson 2006, 4; see also Weerman et al. 2009):

> A street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.[5]

An additional relevant aspect of gangs is the age range of gang members. Gang definitions often use the term 'adolescent' or 'youth', but "only if the term is used loosely to refer to that interstitial age period between childhood and maturity […] it is still possible to defend a position defining adolescence as an analytic property of the gang" (Ball and Curry 1995, 235–36). Therefore, the term 'youth' should be interpreted considering a broad age range, e.g. 13-25 as specified by Goldstein (1991).

As gang definition is essential to understand characteristics of gangs, so is the comprehension of gang membership. Both theoretical and empirical studies have discussed gang membership and its features, addressing: the factors leading youths to join

[4] The Eurogang research network is an international research network of American and European scholars interested in studying gangs outside the U.S.

[5] The term 'troublesome youth group' helps scholars in addressing gang membership and gang-related crimes and behavior in the European context where the term 'gang' could be misunderstood (Weerman et al. 2009). 'Durability' means at least three months; 'street-oriented' suggests that the group spends a lot of time in public places; 'youth' can range from early adolescents to young adults; 'illegal' implies delinquent or criminal activities; and the term 'identity' refers to the group identity of its members.

gangs, the number of gangs and gang members (i.e. gang presence), and the differences between gang members and non-gang members.

Risk and protective factors for joining gangs are generally grouped into five domains: individual, peer group, family, school, and community factors (Decker, Melde, and Pyrooz 2013; Higginson et al. 2018; Howell and Egley 2005; Klein and Maxson 2006). Prior delinquency, being friends with peers who use drugs or are gang members, academic failures, and weak family ties are all examples of indicators associated with increased odds of becoming part of a gang (Howell and Egley 2005; for recent systematic reviews, see Raby and Jones 2016; Higginson et al. 2018). Within the individual domain, ethnic minority status has often been found to be associated with youth gang affiliation (Gilman et al. 2014; McDaniel 2012), though this finding has mostly come from official record studies rather than self-report studies (Matsuda 2014).

The School of Chicago provided among the most relevant contributions on the relationship between crime in urban areas, gang involvement and ethnicity. Through the development of social disorganization theories, scholars highlighted how the urbanization process may affect different groups (e.g., ethnic groups) and their relationship with crime, disorganization and poverty. Park, Burgess, and McKenzie (1984)[6] pointed out that the delinquent behavior was not correlated with individual characteristics, but was rather the result of the rapid urban social change of the city of Chicago. Few decades later, Shaw and McKay (1942) conducted a study to confirm the link between delinquency and the structural characteristics of the environment (e.g., high rate of population turnover, economic instability). Their findings pointed out the concentration of high crime rates in certain city areas, regardless of the immigrant groups populating that area. Lastly, Cohen's (1955) subcultural theory addressed the social processes leading youngsters to join gangs and delinquent behavior. Youths coming from low-class families do not possess adequate means to reach a higher social status and this failure creates a source of strain toward the values and norms of the dominant culture. As a result, lower class youths embrace deviant subcultures as a reaction to the dominant culture. More recent studies have elaborated further theories to explain the contextual factors that contribute to the formation of gangs within ethnic groups of immigrants.

[6] Their work was first published in 1925.

Vigil (2002)—through ethnographic and case studies methods—investigated the marginalization processes fostering gang development among minority youth groups. Focusing on the effects of ecological and socioeconomic marginality on youths who join gangs in the city of Los Angeles, Vigil specifically addressed the role of ethnicity in gang formation through a conceptualization referred to as the multiple marginality framework (1988; 2002). Social and economic marginalization play a significant role in gang formation across different ethnic groups—and provide a better understanding of the processes leading new immigrant youths to join gangs—regardless of their ethnic background. Joining the gang, becoming involved in gang conflicts (e.g. violence and gang-related crimes), hanging out and leaving the gang are all aspects that are influenced by environmental situations rather than single characteristics of the group (2003, 606). Vigil's multiple marginality framework has been further tested by empirical studies (Drake and Melde 2014; Freng and Esbensen 2007; Krohn et al. 2011), aimed at explaining the relationship between ethnicity and gang membership. Freng and Esbensen (2007, 604–6) operationalized Vigil's framework in separate but related factors. Through the assessment of ecological and economic stressors (i.e. parental education, ethnic identity, social isolation), and elements of social control (i.e. parental attachment, limited educational opportunities, school commitment, attitudes towards police, etc.), the authors found support for Vigil's marginality framework. Overall, studies addressing the relation between ethnicity/race and crime have provided viable explanation for gang affiliation among individuals with minority ethnic status. While considering the ethnic aspect of gangs as group composed of Latino immigrants, the present study nonetheless devotes the main attention to gang organizational structure and characteristics of criminal behavior perpetrated by gang members.

Another aspect related with the study of gang membership is the gang presence, that is, the number of gangs and gang members. The pervasiveness of the problem in the U.S. is indicated by official figures: in 2012 "there were an estimated 30,700 gangs and 850,000 gang members throughout 3,100 jurisdictions with gang problems" (Egley, Howell, and Harris 2014, 1).[7] However, gang scholars are sometimes reluctant to rely on

[7] These estimates are findings of the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS). NYGS is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and collects data on a yearly basis from a large, representative sample of local law enforcement agencies. For more information on the National Gang Center (NGC), see https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/.

official records, as gang definitions often vary by city and agency which results in an incoherent assessment of gang prevalence (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Fagan 1989). Furthermore, official records tend to overstate the average age, the proportion of males, and the number of gang members with minority status (Elliott, Huizinga, and Morse 1986; Hawkins et al. 1998). Nevertheless, Curry (2000, 1268)—studying gangs in Chicago—found "an overlap between the gang problem as it is observed in field studies and surveys and the gang problem revealed by analysis of official records". Thus, Curry suggested the combined analysis of surveys and official records to enhance the understanding of gang involvement (for a review, see Curry 2015). Finally, with regard to differences between gang members and non-gang members, research has consistently found that youth who belong to gangs show higher levels of delinquent behavior and have higher victimization rates than non-gang members (Bennett and Holloway 2004; Blaya and Gatti 2010; Carson, Wiley, and Esbensen 2017; Gordon et al. 2004; Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry 2006; Melde and Esbensen 2011; 2013; Sharp, Aldridge, and Medina 2006).

Among the important contribution to gang research and gang membership, the work of Thornberry and colleagues (1993) is particularly relevant to understand gang involvement and group dynamics. The authors developed an interactional theory of delinquency to explain antisocial behavior and its causes, focusing on juvenile delinquency and the relationship between gang involvement and crime (see also Krohn and Thornberry 2008; Thornberry et al. 2003). They examined gang participation and criminal behavior through three models: *selection, enhancement,* and *facilitation*. The selection model refers to the fact that youths who join gangs are already delinquent, that is, the criminal propensity is not influenced by the gang. Conversely, the facilitation model states that gang membership facilitates delinquent behavior, therefore supporting social learning and opportunities perspectives. Lastly, the enhancement model argues that there is an interaction between selection and facilitation, that is, gang members are more delinquent than non-gang members but gang membership enhances their antisocial behavior (Thornberry et al. 1993; 2003). Scholars have tested these three models; research findings have supported the facilitation model over the selection one and have provided even more support to the enhancement model (Curry, Decker, and Arlen 2002; Gatti et al. 2005; Krohn and Thornberry 2008; Melde and Esbensen 2011).

For a comprehensive understanding of how gang involvement facilitates and enhances delinquency of youth gang members, it is also necessary to further address the role played by group dynamics and gang organizational structure.

1.2 Behavioral and organizational features of gangs

The behavior of individuals within groups has long been investigated by different academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and criminology. Researchers have argued in favor of social cohesion dynamics, social learning mechanisms, and/or group's organizational features to explain crime and delinquency. These approaches are particularly relevant for the present study, as they take into consideration individuals' behavior as result of group processes and structural characteristics.

As for social cohesion, classic social and psychological works (Back 1951; Festinger, Schachter, and Back 1950) have defined social cohesion as a 'field of forces' holding individuals within their group. In reviewing the literature on social cohesion, Friedkin (2004) pointed out the importance of combining definitions developed at group and individual level. In fact, the integration of macro and micro level interactions allows for a better comprehension of dynamics shaping group cohesiveness. As the author argued, "groups are cohesive when group-level conditions are producing positive membership attitudes and behaviors and when group members' interpersonal interactions are operating to maintain these group-level conditions" (Friedkin 2004, 410). With regard to gangs, Klein and Crawford (1967) closely investigated the differences between juvenile gangs and other groups in terms of cohesiveness. The authors argued that gang cohesiveness is the result of group dynamics and responses to forces external to the group (e.g. conflicts between gangs). Moreover, there is a positive relationship between delinquency and group cohesion, that is, "in the gang setting, cohesiveness and delinquent behavior are mutual interactors and reinforces" (1967, 64). In fact, outward rivalries often emerge because gang members perceive external parties as potential threats to the integrity of their group. Gang cohesion and integrity are also reinforced by shared values and traditions, which also play an important role for gang formation and proliferation among new immigrant groups (Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008).

To explain individuals' involvement in crime, scholars have also highlighted the mechanisms through which criminal behavior is learned. Sutherland (1937) pointed out that: criminal behavior is learned through social interactions and communications with others; learned deviance occurs within intimate groups as family, peers, friends; the process of learning criminal behavior involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning; leaning includes the techniques and attitudes, and that "a person becomes criminal because of excess of definitions favorable to the violation of law over definitions unfavorable to the violation of law" (see Antwi Bosiakoh 2012, 991). Ronald Akers (1973; 2009) advanced the theory originally developed by Sutherland, arguing that in social interactions—where values and know-how are shared among individuals—people can learn through imitation. The author therefore expanded the notions of differential association theory arguing in favor of the influence of the imitation of peer behavior and the importance of reinforcement for repeating delinquent acts in the future. Ultimately, social learning process constitutes the building block for the creation of social structure (Akers 2009). These concepts have not remained merely theoretical contributions but have received empirical support (see Cao 2004). In fact, social learning has also been found to be a consistent predictor of delinquency, as pointed out by Pratt et al. (2010) in a meta-analysis of 140 studies.

The social influence of peers on offending behavior has also been described by Warr (2002). Among the main focus of the author there is the concept of status, prestige, and respect. In adolescent peer groups, individuals may turn to delinquent and violent behavior because of threats to status coming from external challenges (e.g. rival groups). In this process, youth and especially leaders of the group must respond to retain their status and reduce the risk of ridicule. Offending, however, can also be motivated by youth desire to acquire status. In fact, delinquent behavior "exhibits the qualities that adolescent males prize – daring, spontaneity, toughness, leadership – qualities that are valued under other circumstances by the larger culture itself" (Warr 2002, 57). This contribution is relevant for the present study as it points out the importance of considering individuals' roles and status within a group and its relationship with offending behavior.

As for group organizational features, differences between gangs have been interpreted focusing on structural rather than behavioral aspects, especially since the work of Klein (1995). The author argued that gangs are characterized by *cafeteria-style offending*, i.e.

involved in different criminal activities rather specialized in a type of crime, thus suggesting investigating gang organizational aspects together with individuals' behavior to better understand offending within groups. In this regard, research on the relationship between structure and behavior has shown that increases in gang criminal behavior is associated with higher gang organizational structure (Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991). In fact, even at low level of organization, gang structure influences gang members' criminal behavior: as gang organization increases, so it does the involvement of its members in illicit activities (Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Pyrooz et al. 2012; Sheley et al. 1995). Investigating the relationships between key structural features of gangs and gang activities, Decker (2001) identified several organizational indicators: 1) identifiable leaders or leadership hierarchy, 2) regular meetings, 3) rules or code of conduct, 3) punishment for breaking rules, 4) collective use of money for the purpose of the gang, 5) unique colors and/or symbols, and 6) claim of turf or territory.[8] Gang organizational features have recently been discussed also by Leverso and Matsueda (2019), who have presented a framework of gang organization and gang identity for the investigation of enduring gang membership. In addition to the abovementioned organizational indicators, the authors have pointed out the importance of gang initiation rites (e.g. physical beating). These rites are not only actions that reinforce the symbolic meaning, internal cohesion and organization of the gang, but are also part of group processes that contribute to the development of gang identity. Initiation rites are therefore essential for gang organization and gang identity as they are "imbued with ceremonial ritual and symbolism that serves the latent function of legitimizing the gang on the street" (Leverso and Matsueda 2019, 4). In turn, gang identity reduces uncertainty and provides members with a sense of belonging, importance and status, which lead to strong identification with the gang (Woo et al. 2015). Strong gang identity and organization, enhanced also by gang rules and punishment for their violation, make gang members more likely to engage in violent and criminal behavior, especially against rival groups that may threat the street group status (Leverso and Matsueda 2019, 7–8).

Though much of the literature on behavioral and organizational features characterizing gangs originates from American scholars, over the last years empirical analyses on gangs

[8] Minor differences exist in the identification of the specific gang organizational indicators depending on the type of research and instruments used (e.g. ethnographies, self-report surveys, law enforcement records).

in European cities have increased. In the United Kingdom, and more specifically in London, scholars have investigated street culture and forms of gang violence. Studying street gangs in London, Densley (2014) describes gang characteristics on an evolutionary scale consisting of four stages (i.e., recreation, crime, enterprise, and governance). The initial opportunistic nature of delinquency is replaced by violent behavior to gain recognition and maintain respect in the second stage. Gangs then may evolve into groups organized around monetary gain and profit oriented activities, as drug selling, to eventually reach the governance stage where gangs "regulate the distribution of goods and services […] invest*ing* in the resources of violence [and] territory". (Densley 2014, 537). The importance of space and territory for gangs' illegal activities is also present in the work of Ilan (2015), who highlights how marginalized groups in London may take advantages of lack of control in some areas to express themselves, conduct illegal businesses, and gain status in contexts permeated of social exclusion. Lastly, among the scholars contributing to the knowledge of gangs in the UK stands the work of Hallsworth (2013), who provides a critical analysis of the gang talk (i.e., the discourse on gangs) in the book *The Gang and Beyond*. Addressing the issues around the gang talk how gangs occupy space, the author has challenged "the idea that gangs occupy and totally control life in the ghettos". In fact, for Hallsworth "the truth of matter is that, like invasive weeds, gangs develop and take root in the interstitial spaces […]. It is not so much a process of seizing territory from the formal order, this is a gang-talking myth" (2013, 134).

Gang behavior, group organizational aspects, and gang violence has also been investigated in other European cities. For instance, in a comparative study of gangs in Brussels and Caracas, Vandenbogaerde and Van Hellemont (2016) stress the retaliatory nature of gang violence. Investigating retaliatory violence, the authors found several characteristics of retaliation as potential drivers of gang violence, that is therefore more associated with fear and opportunism than with gangs' adherence to the code of the street (2016, 56–58). The investigation of violent behavior related to European street gangs has not been limited to Brussels; other scholars have provided an analytical description of the nature of gang violence across other European cities. For instance, in a recent book chapter published within the *Handbook of Global Urban Health*, Irwin-Rogers and colleagues (2019) bring together studies from different European cities to inform about the demographic characteristics of gang members and gangs' offending behavior in

European urban areas (including amongst others London, Brussels, and the Swedish cities Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö). In London, using government agencies data, scholars have found that the majority of gang members are black (78%, *n = 2,907*) and that overall violent crime accounts for the most recurrent type of gang offence. Through police data, researchers revealed the different ethnic gangs existing in Brussels, composed of North Africans, individuals from the Sub-Saharan region, and mixed ethnicities. Such groups have been characterized by versatile offending behavior, including property crimes, drug-related crimes, and violent crimes as the main type of offenses. Lastly, within the Stockholm gang intervention program, scholars (e.g., Rostami 2016; Rostami, Leinfelt, and Holgersson 2012; Sturup, Gerell, and Rostami 2019) have recently investigated the nature of gangs in Sweden, finding street groups ethnically heterogeneous and involved in a wide range of illegal behavior comprising property offences, violent crimes as assaults and homicides, and weapon offences committed also through combat weapons as hand grenades (see Sturup, Gerell, and Rostami 2019). Finally, in terms of gang organization, the Irwin-Rogers and colleagues (2019) report that "the emerging street gangs are less formally organized than the first generation of gangs in Sweden" though "more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to understand the current organization of street gangs" (2019, 501). Previous research on street gang behavior and organization in the U.S. and in other geographical context as Europe is essential to inform further studies aiming at revealing the characteristic of street groups as well as their criminal nature in other contexts as Italy.

On a broader level, research findings about the degree of organization of street gangs and its relation to crime have not always been consistent. In a study addressing key features of gang membership, Decker and Curry (2000) described two main perspectives found in the literature that are related to gang organization and behavior: 1) the instrumental-rational perspective, describing gangs are organizations with formal rules, procedures and control from the top; 2) the informal-diffuse perspective, describing gangs as loose-knit groups with shifting levels of membership, rare or informal meetings, limited rules, and members motivated by self-interests rather than collective purpose (see also Pyrooz et al. 2012).

Study results supporting the instrumental-rational perspective describe gangs as well-organized groups with a defined structure and an economic strategy of reinvesting illegal

profits into the gang (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Padilla 1992; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Skolnick et al. 1990; Taylor 1990; Sudhir A. Venkatesh 1997; Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Levitt 2000). Conversely, research findings supporting the informal-diffuse perspective has placed less emphasis on the influence of gang organization on individuals' behavior. Several studies have described gangs as groups with informal-individual characteristics (Decker and Curry 2002; Decker and Van Winkle 1995; Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Fagan 1989; Hagedorn 1988; Klein 1995; Klein, Maxson, and Cunningham 1991; Windle and Briggs 2015). According to this literature, gangs are groups that lack organizational structure and whose members act based on self-interest rather than a common goal. Leadership is volatile and situational, there are no well-defined roles and formal rules, and reinforcement for lack of discipline is absent. In such groups, meetings occur rarely and little illegal proceeds are reinvested in gang-related activities, as "gang members distribute drugs for individual as opposed to a collective purpose" (Pyrooz et al. 2012, 87). With regard to reinvestment of drug profits into the gang, Decker and colleagues (1998) found that even more hierarchical and bureaucratic gangs (e.g. the Gangster Disciples in Chicago) were not well coordinated in drug sales nor they had a shared budget resulting from their activities. Overall, the informal-diffuse perspective has received more support than the instrumental-rational one (Pyrooz et al. 2012). However, Pyrooz and colleagues have suggested that "gang organization should operate on a continuum ranging from informal-diffuse gangs to instrumental-rational gangs rather than as a dichotomy" (2012, 100). In line with the scholars' argument, this research investigates gang's organizational structure and criminal behavior with a more flexible approach as it allows to highlight different levels of gang organization.

Gang organizational features have also been investigated to elaborate general gang typologies. Klein and Maxson (1996; 2006) explored structural characteristics of gangs and developed a five-category typology that has reached a consensus among researchers.[9] To design the structural gang typology, the two scholars analyzed criminal justice data and conducted interviews with law enforcement gang experts from a random sample of U.S. cities with reported gang problems. Klein and Maxson took into consideration several indicators—presence of subgroups, size, average age, duration, territory, and

[9] For other gang typologies, see Van Gemert et al. (2008, 81).

crime versatility—categorizing gangs as: traditional, neotraditional, compressed, collective, specialty (Table 1). The authors suggested to read and interpret this categorization with caution, as the study was conducted in a period characterized by a major proliferation of gangs across the U.S. As a result, over time collective gangs may become less common, as they could be the effect of some temporary changes, while compressed gangs may evolve into neotraditional or traditional gangs. Despite the potential limitations, this categorization provides several gang indicators and therefore represents a suitable instrument to evaluate the characteristics of street groups.

Table 1. Gang typologies as identified by Klein and Maxson (1996, 4)

Type	Subgroups	Size	Age Range	Duration	Territorial	Crime versatility
Traditional	Yes	Large (>100)	Wide (20-30 years)	Long (>20 years)	Yes	Yes
Neotraditional	Yes	Medium-large (>50)	[no pattern]	Short (<10 years)	Yes	Yes
Compressed	No	Small (<50)	Narrow (<10 years)	Short (<10 years)	[no pattern]	Yes
Collective	No	Medium-large (>50)	Medium-wide (>10 years)	Medium (10-15 years)	[no pattern]	Yes
Specialty	No	Small (<50)	Narrow (<10 years)	Short (<10 years)	Yes	No

Lastly, comparative studies on gang organization and behavior have found that American gangs are more organized and structured than European gangs, which do not seem to have the same attachment to specific territories (i.e. turfs) nor they are organized to engage in profitable activities (Esbensen and Weerman 2005).[10]

The literature on the relation between gang organizational features and criminal behavior is particularly relevant to assess the nature and characteristics of street groups. Though originating mostly from American scholars, this literature provides a meaningful framework also for studying street gangs in other geographical contexts as Europe. Studies on gangs in the European setting have increased over the last decades, though to date still little information is available about the organizational properties of street gangs in Europe (Decker and Pyrooz 2015). In this regard, the present study addresses the

[10] Nevertheless, it is important to mention once again that many American youth gangs are also not organized or involved in profitable activities (see Pyrooz et al. 2012).

relatively unexplored organizational aspects and criminal behavior of gangs in Milan, a European city which has recently experienced the emergence of Latin American gangs, street groups which seem to be characterized by the organizational indicators presented thus far. The investigation of such groups may therefore serve to shed light on the criminal nature of Latin street gangs in Italy. In fact, today most of the knowledge of such groups derives from sociological accounts exploring the cultural and symbolic group processes among Latino youths (Bugli and Conte 2010; Bugli, Meola, and Milanesi 2008; Conte and Bugli 2008; Cannarella, Lagomarsino, and Queirolo Palmas 2007; Queirolo Palmas 2009a; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005). The empirical analysis of Latin gangs would also promote further criminological studies on violent street youth groups in urban areas, a phenomenon relatively new in Italy. Other cases of street youth groups that have raised concerns over public safety because of their violent and criminal nature regard the so-called *paranzas*, i.e., small gangs composed of juveniles or young adults. Over the last years, these youth groups have emerged in Naples, a southern Italian metropolitan area historically populated by mafia clans. The organizational characteristics and criminal magnitude of such groups remain unclear as well as whether they can be regarded as organized criminal groups (Di Gennaro and Marselli 2017). Nonetheless, their extreme acts of violence on the street have captured the attention of the media and of the judicial and law enforcement authorities (see Di Gennaro and Marselli 2017; Milnernsheim 2018). In conclusion, while the presence and characteristics of organized criminal groups and mafia-type criminal organizations on the Italian soil have been well documented by scholars (e.g., Becucci 2011; Calderoni et al. 2013; Calderoni and Superchi 2019; Campana 2011; Campedelli et al. 2019; Dugato, Calderoni, and Campedelli 2019; Gambetta 1993; Paoli 2003; 2007; Varese 2006; 2012; 2013), to date the scientific criminological knowledge on street gangs in Italy remains limited.

1.3 Gangs and organized crime groups

Research on gang organizational features and criminal behavior has shown that, despite scarce empirical evidence that gangs are formal organizations well-structured around collective economic purposes (Pyrooz et al. 2012), higher gang organization is associated with greater members' involvement in crime (Decker and Pyrooz 2015). More

recently, gang scholars have advanced the knowledge on the relation between gang organization and criminal behavior through the comparison with other criminal groups (see Decker and Pyrooz 2015). Gang research has also aimed at assessing the extent to which gangs resemble or have evolved in form of organized crime groups (Cruz 2010; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker and Curry 2002; Decker and Pyrooz 2014; 2015; Densley 2014; Kelly and Caputo 2005; Smith, Rush, and Burton 2013; Whittaker et al. 2019; Wolf 2010; 2012).

The different nature of organized crime groups—in terms of criminal activities and organizational structure—has for long made it difficult for scholars and policy makers to reach a consensus on what can be referred to as "organized crime", whose concept has been debated since the 1950s (Paoli 2002, 52; for a review, see Paoli and Vander Beken 2014). On the one hand, scholars have highlighted that the mafias, "the ultimate epitome of organized crime", comprise four key characteristics (Paoli 2014, 1): longevity, organizational and cultural complexity, political dominion over their areas of settlement, and ability to control legitimate markets. On the other hand, research on organized crime has focused on criminal groups' involvement in the provision of illicit protection (Gambetta 1993; Varese 2010). According to Varese, organized crime groups "attempt to regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully" (Varese 2010, 14; see also Campana and Varese 2018). Mafia groups, a type of organized crime group, "attempt to control the supply of protection" (Varese 2010, 14; see also 2011).[11] The demand for protection originates in the economy, following the economic model of supply and demand between individuals. The above definitions highlight the importance of the interaction between organized crime and its social environment. In this regard, social ties and social relations are essential for the recruitment and involvement of individuals into organized crime groups (Kleemans and de Poot 2008; Kleemans and van Koppen 2014; see also Kleemans and Van de Bunt 1999; Savona et al. 2017).

[11] Varese takes into consideration specific types of criminal organizations (i.e. The 'Ndrangheta, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, […] and the Japanese yakuza) defining them as "essentially providers of extralegal governance and can be collectively referred to as mafias. These groups engage in extortion— the forced extraction of resources in exchange for services that are not provided. […] they are groups that aspire to govern others by providing criminal protection to both the underworld and the upper world" (Varese 2011, 6).

While academics have provided several theoretical explanations of organized crime (see Kleemans 2014), from a legal perspective, at the international level today there seems to be consensus on the definition adopted by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations General Assembly 2000, 25):

> 'Organized criminal' group shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.[12]

It is important to note, however, that the United Nations definition—although generally accepted—is very broad and comprises different types of organized crime groups. For this reason, debates on a comprehensive definition of organized crime are likely to continue. For instance, in Europe "policymakers are shifting emphasis from "organized" crime to a combination of organized and "serious" crime, [and this shift could be interpreted as] an implicit recognition of the considerable differences in the manifestations of organized crime across the EU and their resulting harm" (Paoli and Vander Beken 2014, 25). A closer examination of the United Nations definition reveals some similarities and differences with the Eurogang definition. In both definitions, the group must exist for a period of time (i.e. durability), but while criminal involvement in gangs shapes the group identity, in organized crime groups criminal involvement is aimed at obtaining financial or material benefit.[13] As previously mentioned, the present study adopts the Eurogang definition, as it provides a valuable conceptualization of street groups, whose nature is evaluated taking into consideration both literature on gangs and organized crime.

With regard to organized crime, scholars have examined criminal groups to highlight the extent to which they are organized in carrying out illicit activities. Studies on drug trafficking organizations (Bright, Hughes, and Chalmers 2012; Decker and Chapman

[12] As per the United Nations General Assembly definition (2000, 25): "'Serious crime' shall mean conduct constituting an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty; 'Structured group' shall mean a group that is not randomly formed for the immediate commission of an offence and that does not need to have formally defined roles for its members, continuity of its membership or a developed structure".

[13] Other differences relate to the fact that, according to the Eurogang definition, gangs are street-oriented groups composed of young individuals, both aspects not included as defining features of organized crime groups.

2008; Li and Liu 2017; Williams 1998; for a systematic review, see Bichler, Malm, and Cooper 2017) and human trafficking networks (Aronowitz 2001; Turner and Kelly 2009) have shown that these type of criminal networks do not have a formal and hierarchical organizational structure. A more flexible structure allows these networks to adapt to different situations and criminal opportunities. The concept of a flexible network is also central in the work of Morselli (2009). The author describes a criminal network as "a self-organizing structure that is essentially driven by the emergent behavior of its parts" and "the organizational systems in which many find themselves when executing their crimes and collaborating with other offenders do not require such extensive planning and long-term organization" (Morselli 2009, 11).

As for gangs, an increasing number of studies have investigated gang activities to assess their level of organization in criminal behavior. In the second half of the 1990s, Decker and colleagues found that gangs were mainly involved in drug sales but seldom well organized (Decker and Van Winkle 1995; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998), thus supporting the informal-diffuse perspective previously discussed. In a further study, Decker organized the discussion of his previous findings through the detailed description of three main categories (Decker 2001, 24–34):

1. Gang organizational features are considered in terms of 1) levels of membership and leaders, and 2) regular meetings and written rules. The former refers to the existence of different membership levels and the presence of leaders within the gang as important indicators of how well the gang is organized. The latter considers that organized gangs meet regularly, have code of conducts and punishments for violations of the rules.

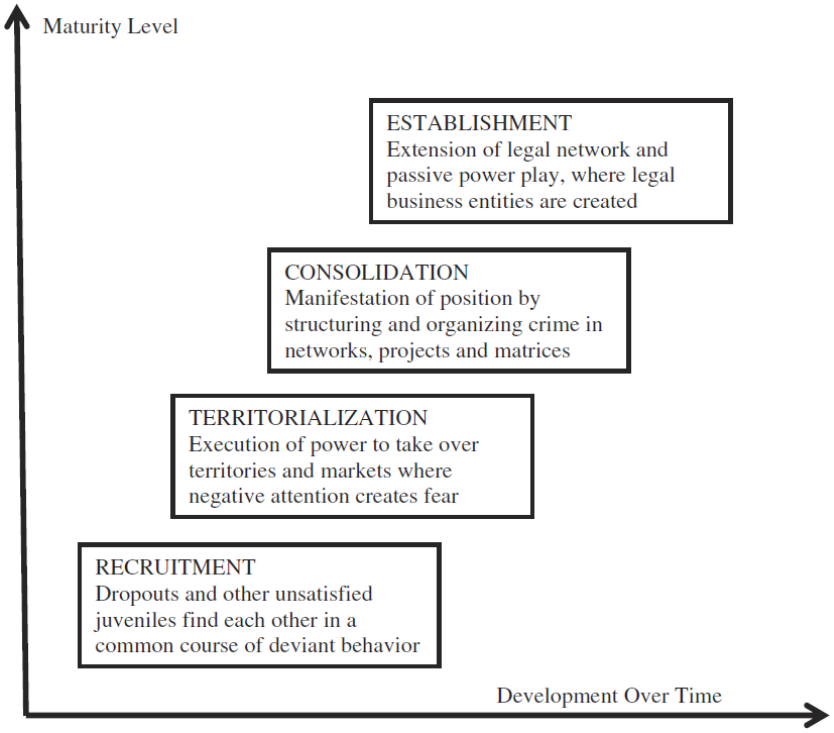
2. Gang activities are divided in five spheres: 1) formal organizations are specialized in specific activities; 2) organized gangs are heavily involved in street drug sales and have important drug profits; 3) these profits are reinvested in the gang; 4) highly organized gangs own legitimate businesses; and 5) gang members are involved in politics.

3. Gang external relationships may indicate that they exhibit signs of more formal organizations, networking with neighborhood stores, gang in other cities, prison gangs or other criminal groups providing crime opportunities.

This conceptualization offers valuable guidelines for future research investigating the extent to which some gangs have evolved into more organized criminal groups. The three categories all play an important role in gang evolution, but as Decker pointed out the organizational characteristics are the most important to look at, preferably in combination with gang activities and network relationships (2001, 36–37). More than a decade later, Decker and Pyrooz (2014, 277; see also 2015) pointed out four areas in which gangs differ from organized crime groups: 1) for gangs, goals achievement has more a symbolic value than an economic one; 2) gangs have a looser organizational structure; 3) gang profit-oriented activities emerge depending on opportunities rather than being planned through a defined cooperation, structure and leadership; and 4) the aspect of territoriality is crucial to gangs, reason why street gangs are more visible than organized crime groups. Research on gangs and organized crime groups has the potential of enhancing our understanding of the nature of criminal behavior, and crime in general (Decker 2001, 21; see also Decker and Pyrooz 2014; 2015).

In this regard, Gottschalk (2008; 2009; 2013; 2016) has recently investigated gang evolution through the lens of maturity models, used in organizational research to predict patterns (i.e. stages) of growth. Similar to lawful organizations, the evolution of criminal organization passes through the overcoming of different problems (e.g. lack of resources, skills or adequate strategies), depending on the stage of growth they are at (Finckenauer 2005; Hagan 2006; see also Kazanjian 1988). With regard to gangs, Ayling (2011, 20)—adopting the evolutionary approach—has described the processes of variation, selection and replication of gangs, intended as "complex systems that [are] self-organized, nested within broader changing socio-economic systems at both national and global level". In line with Ayling's work is the contribution of Gottschalk, who has framed the evolution of gangs through the concept of maturity levels. Gottschalk's maturity levels framework for street gangs is a four-stage maturity model, firstly introduced by the author for criminal organizations (2008). The main assumption of the model is that "a higher level of maturity will result in better performance [reflecting] the degree to which an organization has success" (2016, 4). The four stages of the model are sequentially ordered, hierarchically structured, and each level is cumulative and representative of the development over time. Building upon his previous study on maturity levels for criminal organizations, the author develops a specific model for street gangs (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Maturity model for street gangs (Gottschalk 2016, 6)



The recruitment is the initial stage, where gang members are recruited into a group characterized by a lack of hierarchy, strict selection of members, and punishment for violation of rules. The evolution takes place when the gang begins to identify itself with a specific territory or turf (territorialization stage), upon which it executes limited control.[14] In this phase, risky and criminal activities start to emerge together with a loose structure, although there is not clear and efficient leadership yet. Subsequently, the consolidation stage takes place when leadership emerge, gang leaders introduce formal rules—enforced to a certain extent (e.g. corporal punishment)—and crimes begin to be organized in networks. Leadership roles also serve to evaluate gang members' performance of drug trading or other illegal activities. Finally, the fourth stage sees the establishment of gang presence through the entrance in the legal businesses; at this stage, becoming a member or exiting the gang is more difficult. The gang has a more formal structure with ranks assigned to different components. Through the four stages, a partial and unstructured organization evolves into a complete organization (2016, 6–7).

[14] The territoriality aspect, as previously discussed, is a defining feature of gangs which makes them different when compared with other criminal groups (i.e. gangs are highly visible due to their street-oriented nature).

The evolutionary stages of street gangs have also been addressed by Densley (2014), through the study of "the evolution of gang business" of street gangs in London, UK. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the author has identified four stages of the evolution of gangs. The first stage, the *recreational stage*, refers to groups formed among disadvantaged youths who seek group identity, sense of belonging, and social support within gangs. Leisure activities, lack of strict rules, lack of established rituals and names, and opportunistic delinquent acts characterize such informal groups (2014, 525–26). In the second stage, the *criminal stage*, gang members become more extensively involved in criminal behavior. Violence is more prominent, and the internal cohesion of the group increases to face external threats and conflicts with rival groups. Rivalries shape street gangs which are now identified by names that "better reflect their criminal components" (2014, 527); street duties emerge and reputation becomes important to the extent that violent and criminal acts serve to gain respect and acquire status on the street. In the third stage, the *enterprise stage*, individual goals are substituted by collective financial goals achieved through criminal behavior. The group is now hierarchically structured; recruitment of new members no longer takes place among peers and profit oriented activities as drug dealing are performed, though drug sales are no coordinated by the group. Gang members begin to benefit from such profits but there is no actual accumulation of wealth. Lastly, at the final stage, the *governance stage*, gangs have turned into organized criminal groups, capable of supplying illegal goods and services. Violence is instrumental and activities into the legitimate business emerge. As Densley notes, intelligence activity and control and influence in the community are also central for the group in this final stage.

Ultimately, Gottschalk (2016) and Densley (2014) address the development of street gangs from loose groups to organized criminal group describing how gangs take advantage of contextual factors and illicit businesses to develop into formal criminal organizations. Combined with the literature on gang organizational features and criminal behavior, these studies constitute a meaningful framework to investigate gang activities and conceptualize the evolution of gangs to assess the extent to which gangs resemble or have evolved into formal organizations and/or organized crime groups.

CHAPTER 2 THE EVOLUTION OF LATIN AMERICAN STREET GANGS

Among the various ethnic gangs active in the American continent, Latin American gangs have recently captured the attention of law enforcement authorities and practitioners in several countries, including the U.S., El Salvador, Honduras, and Ecuador. In the U.S., Latin gangs as the MS13 and Barrio 18, known as *maras* and composed of members from Central American countries, have been responsible for numerous incidents of violent crimes, especially in Los Angeles where they originated (International Crisis Group 2017). In the Americas, concerns over public safety and several anti-gang operations have been conducted to tackle and dismantle these gangs. Further, *maras* criminal involvement and alleged transnational ties have led the U.S. Department of Justice to consider them as transnational criminal organizations (U.S. Department of Justice 2017). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin gangs as the Latin King, Netas, and the notorious *maras* have started to appear also in Southern European countries, namely Spain and Italy. Italian cities as Genoa first, and Milan afterwards, have seen an increasingly amount of gang-related violence in public space which had not been observed before. Among the Italian cities, since 2004 Milan has been the most affected urban area, but to date no criminological inquiries have been conducted to reveal and compare Latin gangs' characteristics and assess their criminal involvement. For these reasons, the present research focuses specifically on Latin gangs in Milan with the aim of enhancing the scientific knowledge on such groups.

In order to better understand the peculiarities of Latin gangs, this chapter focuses on the most important aspects and characteristics of Latin American gangs across countries. In particular, the first paragraph introduces the literature on the gang problem in Central America and the second one illustrates the gang situation in South American countries. The review proceeds introducing the arrival of such groups in Europe and concludes with the description of previous studies on Latin gangs in Italy to highlight the gap of knowledge in the literature.

2.1 The gang problem in Central America

Latin America is today one of the most violent regions in the world, with Central America as the sub-region with the second highest homicide rates (25 victims per 100,000 inhabitants) in the world after Southern Africa (UNODC 2014). A closer look at the national homicide rates in 2012 reveals that in the top four countries three are from Central America (2014, 24): Honduras as the first (90.4), followed by Venezuela (53.7), Belize (44.7), and El Salvador (41.2).[15] Among the main causes of this persisting violence there are gangs, who have become a thorny issue for governments and public safety agencies. Gangs appearance and consolidation in Central American countries have not only been due to poverty or social disorganization—as per gangs in the U.S.—but also to more macro-level and meso-level factors. Other than globalization, transnational migration and governmental policies have played a central role in fostering the spread of gangs in Central America, whose weak criminal justice systems and lack of public security have constituted a fertile terrain for their development (Arana 2005; see also Rodgers and Muggah 2009). Gangs in Central American countries (e.g. El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala)—known as *maras*—have transnational roots, hence their origins trace back to other countries, namely the United States (Cruz 2010; Wolf 2010).

The notorious *Dieciocho* (also known as 18th Street gang, Barrio 18 or Mara-18) and *Mara Salvatrucha* (also known as MS13), originated in the streets of Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1980s, respectively. The former gang is a multi-ethnic gang, it started as a group of Mexican immigrants who soon began to accept other Hispanics (mostly Salvadorans and Guatemalan); the latter gang has historically been formed mostly by Salvadoran immigrants escaping from the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992) (Valdez 2011). Born as a form of protection against other existing gangs (Adams and Pizarro 2009), the *Dieciocho* and the *Mara Salvatrucha* rapidly became rivals, with violent and often deadly conflicts still persisting today. In the Los Angeles area, fights between gangs became so frequent and ferocious that in 1996 the U.S. Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.[16] The law established that non-

[15] Rates per 100,000 population.

[16] Pub. L. 104-208 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 is available at (see, p. 547), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf (accessed July 31, 2017).

U.S. citizens convicted of crimes with a sentence of one or more years in prison had to be deported to their home countries. Gang members, due to their increasing involvement in illegal activities and status of non-U.S. citizens, were arrested and deported back to Central American countries. U.S. immigration policy and the intense migratory flow that followed U.S. law have contributed to spreading gang members to Central American countries (Cruz 2010; Wolf 2010). Much debate has followed this decision, with harsh critics to the U.S. deportation. As an example, Papachristos (2005, 53) pointed out that "U.S. immigration policy has amounted to unintentional state-sponsored gang migration. Rather than solving the gang problem, the United States may have only spread it".

El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras were among the most affected countries, while Nicaragua did not receive the same flood of deportees because its immigrants—who had mostly settled in Miami—had not been involved in gangs to the same extent (Rodgers and Baird 2015, 482). Approximately 50,000 convicts and 160,000 illegal immigrants were deported to Central America over a decade (UNODC 2007, 40–42). Local governments, affected by years of civil war, lacked in organization and were not well equipped to deal with such overflow. Furthermore, Central American countries could not get access to detailed information on criminal deportees because of the U.S. policy on immigration (Arana 2005). Central American countries therefore were faced with complete inadequacy in dealing with deported gang members, who had lived most of their life in the United States and had grown up in the streets.

Youths gangs had already proliferated before transnational migrations flows took place, but the deportees imported the American gang culture into Central America (Cruz 2010). In a hostile environment and without their families who had remained in the U.S., deported youths and gang members began to reorganize themselves in cliques (i.e. local groups of *maras*), in the search for a sense of identity and protection (see Cruz 2010). Preexisting turf gangs turned into cliques that eventually formed federations in the form of the two big *maras* (i.e., the MS13 and the *Dieciocho*). This process happened through the adoption of "a system of behavior, norms, and values that made them part of the same organization" (Cruz 2010, 386–87). However, Central American *maras* were not directly controlled by the *maras* in the U.S.; it was more a symbolic affiliation than the result of a hierarchical organizational structure with leaders able to execute power and control over the activities of gangs in Central America (Ward 2013). Moreover, gangs soon began to

recruit youths—some of whom had served as soldiers in civil wars (Adams and Pizarro 2009)—with initiation rituals consisting of beatings for boys and raping for girls (see Etter 2010). This brutal way of initiate new members allowed the *maras* to build a strong loyalty toward the group, considered as family fulfilling the lives of their members. Reviewing the factors leading to become a member of the *maras*, Bruneau (2014) pointed out that socioeconomic factors alone may not explain gang joining. Other factors to be considered are the "attraction of the lifestyle, a whole range of licit and illicit pursuits that promise fun and excitement […] a desire for support and respect, and peer pressure" (2014, 159). Social cohesion among cliques belonging to the same *mara* (either MS13 or *Dieciocho*) increased as a result of regular meetings aimed at discussing how to deal with authorities and threats posed by the rival gang. The early 2000s represent the turning point of the *maras* in terms of evolution into more organized networks. Central American countries developed severe anti-gang policies and the arrival of crack cocaine on the streets provided such groups with new opportunities to make profit through drug-related crimes (i.e. drug dealing and drug trafficking) (see Cruz 2010).

Central American gangs' evolution toward a higher degree of organization was mainly fostered by *Mano Dura* policies, a set of notorious highly repressive anti-gang policies implemented in Honduras and El Salvador in 2003 (Hume 2007; Schuberth 2016; Wolf 2017). Anti-gang laws were based on a zero-tolerance policy that would allow authorities to arrest and detain individuals for being gang members, regardless of any crime involvement and based solely on their physical appearance (e.g. tattoos, clothes) (Bruneau 2014, 161). El Salvador and Honduras—as well as Guatemala and Nicaragua, with softer anti-gang policies—have all implemented *Mano Dura* policies, carried out by "armed forces in operations against gangs; and all developed operations that allowed for the capture and mass incarceration of gang members, thus saturating and overpopulating their prisons" (2014, 162). In overcrowded prisons, detainees were placed in separate areas divided by gang membership to avoid riots. Thus, gang members lived in physical proximity that facilitated recruitment of new members, networking and permitted gangs' development into more structured organizations. With most of gang members and leaders imprisoned, the initial years after anti-gang policies saw a decrease in the number of violent incidents. However, the situation proved to be temporarily, as soon the gang problem arose again in event more violent forms. On the one hand, newly established

gang leadership and organizational structures in prisons expanded outside. On the streets, gangs reacted to suppression from the state with brutal and random killings, contributing to increasing national homicide rates (see UNODC 2011, 50–52). On the other hand, gangs had to turn into more professionalized and less visible criminal organizations to avoid police detection. Specific roles were established among gang members. Gangs, now more structured, began to exploit new criminal opportunities emerged through contacts in prison with drug-trafficking cartels and by implementing lucrative crimes as extortion and racketing.

Initially, gang activities mainly involved local and small-scale drug dealing and petty crimes; lately gangs began to engage in more sophisticated crimes (Arana 2005). Though not directly involved in drug trafficking, gangs took advantage of contacts in prisons and the geographic location of Central American countries through which drugs were trafficked by Colombian and Mexican cartels. The *maras* acted as "local security apparatus of these small cartels, or as small-time street vendors informally connected to them" (Rodgers and Baird 2015, 483). Over the years, gangs have established and maintained control over their territories to assure the profitability of criminal economic markets (Cruz 2010). At local level, gangs have obtained important financial gains "by developing extortion rackets which imposed 'security taxes' on small- and medium-size business in the zone they controlled" (Cruz 2010, 392). At transnational level, beside the links with drug-trafficking organizations, the *maras* have been involved in firearms trafficking, trafficking of stolen vehicles, and migrant smuggling (Adams and Pizarro 2009; Etter 2010). Such criminal activities have exploited the weaknesses along the U.S.-Mexico border, through which gang members have passed to go back to the United States. The phenomenon of undocumented migration and movement across the border of gang members fleeing back and forth among Central America, Mexico, and United States has been defined as "revolving door" (Boerman 2007, 39). Cross-border ties, favored by the freedom with which gang members moved across these countries, have permitted the further expansion of gangs from Central America back into the United States, in an even more sophisticated and problematic way (Arana 2005). As a result of the evolution of Central American gangs, in 2012 the U.S. Department of the Treasury named the *Mara Salvatrucha* as a transnational criminal organization, because of its involvement in

serious transnational criminal activities (e.g. drug trafficking, human smuggling, sex trafficking, murder).[17]

The debate about whether the MS13 and, more generally, Latin American gangs are actual transnational criminal organizations is likely to continue. On the one hand, researchers challenge the assumption that these groups are 'supergangs' with a transnational organizational structure and effective leadership (Cruz 2010; Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers 2009; Wolf 2010; 2012). On the other hand, governmental institutions have begun to consider the *maras* as criminal organizations with transnational ties posing a serious security threat. In the U.S., according to estimates of the National Gang Intelligence center, the MS13 today has "more than 30,000 members in the world and more than 10,000 in the United States. [With active presence] in at least forty American states and the District of Columbia is one of the largest street gangs in the United States" (U.S. Department of Justice 2017, 1).

In summary, the following factors leading to the upsurge of the gang problem in Central America have been identified: 1) the U.S. immigration policy, 2) Central American states weaknesses, 3) *Mano Dura* suppression policies and the lack of intervention and prevention programs capable of keeping youths out of gangs, and 4) the *maras* involvement in local and transnational illegal enterprises. Harsh anti-gang policies and weak rule of law in Central American countries have undoubtedly contributed to the spread and evolution of gangs in Central America. However, less evidence has been found by academic research on the actual transnational nature of such groups. In line with previous studies, the present inquiry aims at investigating the extent to which Latin American gangs are in contact and/or cooperate with gangs in Central American or the U.S., to highlight whether Latin gangs appeared in new contexts are criminal organizations with transnational ties.

2.2 Gangs in South America

In recent decades, globalization and transnational migration—together with other socio-political factors—have had a profound impact on South American countries and

[17] U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2012. "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization," October 11. https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx (accessed July 31, 2017).

their societies. As Central America, South American countries as Colombia and Ecuador have not remained immune to the problem of street gangs.[18]

In the second half of the last century, Colombia experienced rapid growth and urbanization, as well as decades of civil conflicts between government and paramilitary forces (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013, 3076). By the end of the 1980s, the presence of non-state armed groups, the advent of crack cocaine on the streets, and the expansion of drug cartels dramatically increased the level of violence in the country (for a review, see Imbusch, Misse, and Carrión 2011, 109–11). Medellín was the most affected city, ranking at the top of the list for homicide rates in Colombia and in the world (see UNODC 2006, 19). In this context dominated by armed violence and feeling of insecurity, urban poor communities have also been exposed to gang warfare.

Gangs in Colombia have existed since the 1960s, though initially street gangs were small groups with low visibility (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw 2001). During the 1980s, gangs became larger groups through the recruitment of vulnerable young people. Among the risk factors for joining illegal groups among Colombian youths in Medellín, Doyle (2016) pointed out: the high underdevelopment of the region, individuals' social exclusion, and the structural inequalities and institutional fragility of Colombian society. Since gangs' expansion in the 1980s, gangs have become one of the key actors in a scenario of urban violence dominated by the presence of other criminal actors as armed groups (e.g. militia groups, paramilitary groups). The difference between non-state armed groups and gangs lies in the fact that gangs lack a political orientation and do not aim to overthrow the state (Hazen 2010, 376). Colombian Gangs participate in urban conflicts, are responsible for violent acts, and "depend on local or retail consumer drug sales, extortion rackets, money laundering, and loan sharking in their neighborhoods" (Rodgers and Baird 2015, 488). Over the last two decades, homicide rates in Medellín have decreased significantly (Doyle 2016, 8), but structural inequalities remain, in a general context where it is often difficult to distinguish between non-state actors and street gangs.

As Colombia, Ecuador has seen an increase of gang presence since the 1980s. In Ecuador, street gangs are referred to as *naciones* or *pandillas*. *Naciones* operate across

[18] Other Latin American countries as Brazil and Venezuela are also greatly affected by gangs, but they will not be covered in this review as gangs composed of members from such countries have not appeared in Italy and Milan. With regard to Mexico, gangs exist and are active actors in the region, but most research has rather focused on drug trafficking organizations (DTOs).

neighborhoods, are part of an extended network comprising several local gangs and gang members pay fees to be part of it (Torres 2006). *Pandillas* are turf gangs (i.e. local gangs) responsible for violent crimes within their neighborhood. According to Rodgers and Baird (2015, 488–89), Guayaquil has approximately 1,200 *pandillas, "*with a total of 65,000 members […] aged between 12 and 20 years old". One of the most famous *naciones* is the Latin Kings,[19] known for the use brutal violence and for their transnational nature, that is, presence in different countries. As the *maras*, Latin Kings are different than other gangs to the extent that they have a transnational character, having expanded from the United States to Ecuador in the 1990s and later on, in the early 2000s, from Ecuador to Spain and Italy (Cerbino and Barrios 2008, 16; see also, Queirolo Palmas 2009a; 2009b). Even far from their country of origin, Latin gangs can be recognized by the same set of symbols, dress code and colors (e.g. black and gold). Similar to other gangs, part of the gang identity is shaped by criminal activity (e.g., robberies, drug sales, assault). Moreover, the presence of the Latin Kings in different countries reflect the transnational migration flows and the process of globalization that have characterized postindustrial societies (see Hagedorn 1998).

The discussion of gangs' presence in Latin American countries has highlighted the formation and evolution of Latin gangs, whose criminal nature has often been discussed by researchers and governmental institution in the attempt to tackle and disrupt criminal groups with alleged transnational ties. Transnational Latin groups have recently emerged also in Europe, where their involvement in violent crimes in Spain and Italy has sparked media, law enforcement, and scholars' attention.

2.3 The arrival of Latin American gangs in Europe

Over the last two decades, the appearance of transnational Latin American gangs in Southern European countries has attracted the attention of researchers interested in studying Latin gangs outside their context of origin.

Latin gangs first emerged in Spain (and Italy) in the early 2000s, when Spanish cities—Barcelona and Madrid in particular—began to be populated by Latin gangs as the Latin Kings, Queen Nation and the *Asociación Ñeta*, composed of 1.5 generation immigrant

[19] Other important *naciones* are the Vatos Locos and the Ñetas. For further detail, see (Torres 2006, 5).

youths from Latin America (Brotherton 2007, 372).[20] Shortly after their appearance on the streets, local governments started to investigate their characteristics and involvement in crime, to understand whether their nature was of cultural associations or rather (criminal) gangs. In 2005, the Prevention Services of Barcelona City Council promoted a first research about Latin American young people living in Barcelona (see Feixa, Porzio, and Recio 2006). The study comprised mainly qualitative methods (e.g. life histories, in-depth interviews, participant observation), through which researchers got in contact with gang members. The results offered preliminary insights into the life of Latin youth immigrants and gang members, enhancing the understanding of Latin groups and contrasting the media construction of these groups as criminal gangs (Feixa et al. 2008). In fact, much of the public opinion about Latin groups in Barcelona has been shaped by the media, which begun to portray these groups as criminal gangs following a series of violent crimes occurred between 2003 and 2005. Newspaper articles addressing gang criminal involvement rapidly became common among media outlets, "but they all promote an image of Latin-American street gangs as a new form of youth violence […] that is becoming a public security problem" (Feixa et al. 2008, 69). According to Feixa and his colleagues (2008), media representations contributed to create a distorted image of Latin American immigrant youths through a social construction of Latin groups as gangs (see also Queirolo Palmas 2012).

Contrary to media representations, ethnographic research in public spaces (i.e. parks, streets) has revealed that Latin American gangs are "street-oriented groups, with names, symbols and long-established traditions, composed of youngsters of deprived social backgrounds [whose] activities are not part of the core group identity" (Feixa et al. 2008, 65). Hence, Latin gangs appear to have some characteristics of the Eurogang definition, but the criminal involvement of gang members is based on individual choices not related to the gang identity. These findings, together with an open dialogue between researchers, the Barcelona City Council and Latin groups, led the Government of Catalonia to institutionalize the Latin Kings and *Asociación Ñeta*, registering them as youth cultural

[20] These youngsters arrived in Spain in the late 1990s mainly due to the family reunion state policy, which permitted the reunion of youths—who had lived in Latin America—with their family members, mostly women, who had already settled in Spain during the 1990s. This migration process and the initial stage of transnational families, with mothers in Europe and sons and daughters in Latin America, have shaped the identities of youths, struggling with past lives and present difficulties to socially integrate into the new society (Feixa et al. 2008, 69–70).

associations in 2006 and 2007, respectively (Queirolo Palmas 2015, 5). These two groups presented a statute to local authorities declaring their commitment to promote cultural activities and refusing the use of violence. Despite their recognition as cultural associations, Latin groups continued to be involved in crime, leading to the end of the experiment of gang normalization in Catalonia. In 2012, more repressive policies began to be enforced with arrests and imprisonments. Police operations in Barcelona resulted in the arrest of members of the legal faction of the Latin Kings who were still involved in criminal activities.[21] Thus, in recent years Catalonia has adopted a similar approach of the institutions in Madrid, which have been embracing harsher models of police intervention as they have considered Latin groups illicit associations to be targeted with repressive actions (Canelles 2008, 111; see also Queirolo Palmas 2015). From a legal perspective, Latin gangs are sometimes classified within the framework of organized crime, especially after the introduction of the legal definitions of criminal organizations and criminal groups in the Spanish Criminal Code in 2011 (Queirolo Palmas 2015, 10).[22] Yet, a closer look at the characteristics of street gangs (and Latin gangs) in Spain reveals the differences between them and criminal organizations (Art. 570 *bis*) and criminal groups (Art. 570 *ter*).[23] Indeed, the organizational structure, criminal involvement, and objectives (together with demographic composition) of street gangs are far less sophisticated than criminal organizations or criminal groups (Kazyrytski 2012, 343–44). Overall, literature on Latin gangs in Spain has mostly described these groups as cultural associations providing social references for its members seeking common values, norms and cultural identity. These studies have enhanced our understanding of the nature of Latin groups in new contexts. In addition, research findings have provided valuable contributions to implement effective prevention and integration policies, though the persistent Latin groups' involvement in crime has resulted in further law enforcement responses.

[21] Oms, Javier. 2015. "Los Mossos Acaban Con La Facción Legal de Los Latin Kings." *El Mundo*, June 10. http://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2015/06/10/557734c5e2704e13218b4588.html (accessed August 22, 2017).

[22] Circular 2/2011 of the State Prosecutor's Office on the reform of the Criminal Code by Organic Law 5/2010; the Prosecutor's Office in Catalonia differs from Prosecutor's Office in Madrid to the extent that it rarely mentions Latin gangs when reporting on organized crime.

[23] See pages 244-245 at http://perso.unifr.ch/derechopenal/assets/files/legislacion/l_20110301_01.pdf (accessed August 24, 2017).

2.4 Delinquent youth groups and Latin American gangs in Italy

In Italy, delinquent youth groups and street gangs have increasingly been associated with aggressiveness and violent behavior over the last two decades. The shift of the perception of youth groups from social to problematic ones has been due to different factors. Firstly, acts of bullying turned the attention of the authorities and public opinion on more deviant aspects, and news media began to use the term baby gang'[24] extensively to describe individuals' engagement in delinquent groups. Secondly, the emergence of youth groups among immigrants, especially from Latin America, "have generated a new tendency towards the criminalization of young people's behavior" (Crocitti et al. 2013, 148).

As for academic research, Italian studies on delinquent youth groups and juvenile street have often addressed gangs with the term *bande giovanili*, which refers to a group of adolescents who have established rules and boundaries and are involved in illicit activities (Moyersoen 2016, 131). Italian literature has applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate gang membership and criminal behavior. Quantitative studies have mostly used survey methods and techniques (e.g. questionnaires) to gather data. In this regard, the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD) has administered surveys in schools to measure risk factors for gang membership, deviant behavior and criminal involvement at national level (Blaya and Gatti 2010; Gatti et al. 2008; Gatti, Haymoz, and Schadee 2011; Gatti et al. 2013).[25] Blaya and Gatti (2010) administered the ISRD-2 questionnaire, sampling 5,236 Italian students aged 12 to 16 in 15 different cities.[26] The research revealed greater involvement of boys in deviant youth groups than girls, with theft, vandalism and group fights as the most common delinquent acts. Further analyses conducted by Rocca et al. (2015, 174) of the ISRD-3 showed that 4.1% of the total sample resulted as a member of a youth gang, slightly in decline

[24] Crocitti et al. (2013, 152) analyzed newspaper articles including the word 'baby gang' published in *La Repubblica* over the period 2000-2011. The number of news ranges from circa 100 (in 2001) to circa 350 (in 2011), with a peak of over 450 news in 2006.

[25] Most of the research conducted through the self-report method is comparative, i.e. it has involved Italy together with many other European countries, with the exception of Gatti et al. (2008) and Rocca et al. (2015), that have only published findings regarding Italy.

[26] The questionnaire included the seven Eurogang group's questions to assess gang membership. For further details, see (Gatti, Haymoz, and Schadee 2011, 11).

compared to the 5.2% recorded in the IRSD-2. As for qualitative research, several sociological studies have focused on deviant youth groups and Latin American gangs (Bugli 2009; Bugli and Conte 2010; Bugli, Meola, and Milanesi 2008; Bugli and Conte 2010; Crocitti and Barbieri 2012; Crocitti et al. 2013; Di Gennaro and Marselli 2017; Raspelli 2016; Queirolo Palmas 2009b; 2009a; 2010; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005). In a recent study, Di Gennaro and Marselli (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with judges, prosecutors, and social workers to shed light on juveniles street gangs in Naples, south of Italy, addressing the factors associated with their formation and use of violence. The authors note that juveniles' lack of legal opportunities, poor parental control, and the social proximity with individuals embedded in criminal subcultures and dedicated to illicit activities lead youngsters to involvement in violent crimes (2017, 152). In this regard, gangs tend to form in areas highly affected by criminality; street gangs emerged in areas where criminal groups already exist become soon involved in offending behavior which mostly take the form of violent crimes, illicit use of weapons, and drug dealing. Lastly, the research also reflects on effective intervention programs capable of reducing juveniles' involvement into gangs in socially disorganized contexts characterized also by the presence of drug markets and drug use. According to the experts interviewed, primary and secondary socialization policies targeting families at risk and including youths' support in school settings should be preferred to crime prevention programs merely aiming at reducing gangs criminal behavior (Di Gennaro and Marselli 2017).

With regard to Latin American gangs, the situation is more complex, as they are linked to transnational migration processes to which Latino youths have been exposed (see Queirolo Palmas 2010). After Spain, Italy has been the second most common European destination for Latino immigrants, mostly Ecuadorians (Moyersoen 2016, 132). Migration to Italy, mainly to Genoa and Milan, started with the migration of women in the mid-1990s which resulted in the creation of transnational families. Subsequently, since the early 2000s Latin American youths began to migrate to Italy to reunify with their family or relatives through the family reunification policy.[27] Shortly after their arrival, 1.5 generation immigrants were faced with difficulties in socially integrating due to cultural differences and language barriers. The lack of parents' presence and weak

[27] Art. 28. Legislative Decree 286/98. For further information, see: http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/normativa/procedureitalia/Pagine/Ricongiungimento-familiare.aspx

family ties resulted in youths' fragmented identities, divided by their past life in their home country and present and future life in the host society (Bugli and Conte 2010, 98–100). To find a sense of belonging, experience freedom and escape from life strains and anonymity, these youngsters turned to Latin group of peers (Cannarella, Lagomarsino, and Queirolo Palmas 2007; Queirolo Palmas 2009a; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005). Moyersoen (2016, 133) has identified seven underlying characteristics of Latin American gangs in Italy: 1) gang members come from countries that experienced civil wars in the last century; 2) gang members come from disrupted families characterized by parental separation and father absence; 3) poor socio-economic conditions of the country of origin and lack of future perspectives; 4) mother's migration to other countries (e.g. United States, Spain, Italy) and subsequent abandonment of the child to his/her relatives; 5) youngster's reunification (legal immigration) with the mother; 6) youngster's feeling of loneliness after the reunification; 7) youngster's search for peer groups with which s/he identifies.

To deal with Latin gangs, the city of Genoa followed a similar approach designed in Barcelona. Specific interventions were made to promote the cultural value of these groups, to end gang fights, and to contrast the deviant image socially constructed by the media (on gang intervention, see Hallsworth and Young 2009). Through the mediation of a research group of sociologists from the University of Genoa, members of Latin Kings and Ñetas met with local authorities, with "positive effects both for young people and the wider local community" (Crocitti et al. 2013, 163).

In Milan, the appearance of Latin American gangs dates back to 2004-2005, when members of different *pandillas* (i.e. Latin King, Latin Forever, Comando**,** Ñetas) became involved in several incidents of violent crimes including assaults, robberies and attempted murders.[28] In 2006, the media began to enforce the idea of an emerging issue in the city (Raspelli 2016, 2–3), due to an escalation of criminal acts committed by gang members. Violent street crimes eventually led to Operation *Street fighters*, the first police operation against Latin gangs in Milan. Unlike Genoa, where gang violence has diminished over the years, Milan has been experiencing violent crimes since gangs' first appearance. Moreover, several incidents of serious offenses have been committed by the notorious

[28] *Affaritaliani.it*. 2006. "Risse, Bande Rivali E Rapine. Storie Di Sudamericani a Milano," November 6. http://www.affaritaliani.it/milano/bandesudamericane2810.html (accessed August 28, 2017).

MS13 and Barrio18 (or *Dieciocho*) since 2008. Despite media attention and a stronger focus of local authorities on criminal involvement among Latin American immigrants, to date little academic literature has investigated organizational and criminal features Latin gangs in Milan. Indeed, most of the knowledge about the criminal and organizational features of Latin gangs comes from judicial files and newspaper articles reporting major police anti-gang operations conducted over the years.[29]

In Operation *Street fighters*, the police arrested 27 gang members (18 juveniles) of the Latin Kings and Comando (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2005). Juveniles were charged for affrays (i.e. fighting of two or more persons in a public space), robberies and thefts, attempted murder, and for being part of an unlawful association to commit a crime.[30] From 2006 to 2010, police investigations led to the identification of about 4,000 Latin American gang members in the city of Milan (Moyersoen 2016, 139). In 2010, the Juvenile Court of Milan[31] convicted 12 minors for the crime of unlawful association, pointing out: 1) the hierarchical structure of the Latin Kings, 2) the different roles of its members, and 3) a process of "internationalization", that is, the acceptance of youths of different nationalities within the gang (2016, 136).

In 2012, Operation *Secreto* led to the arrest of 26 gang members—of whom 8 were minors—confirming the active presence of Latin gangs in Milan (i.e. MS-13, Ñetas, Trebol, and Latin Kings*'* factions of Lubedz, Chicago, New York).[32] In 2013 took place Operation *Amor de Rey*, during which 75 gang members—of whom 18 were minors—were arrested (Tribunale Ordinario di Milano 2013; Tribunale per i Minorenni di Milano 2013). Gang members were indicted for a wide range of criminal offenses (e.g. crimes against persons, property crimes, illegal possession of firearms), including participation in unlawful association to commit crime and drug trafficking.[33] Despite police efforts to dismantle Latin American gangs, recent police anti-gang operations (i.e., *Mareros,*

[29] Six main police anti-gang operations were identified from open sources: *Street fighters* (2006), *Secreto* (2012), *Amor de Rey* (2013), *Mareros* (2013), *Trinitario* (2014), and *Barrio 18* (2015).

[30] The offense *unlawful association to commit a crime* is regulated by Art. 416 of the Italian Criminal Code (see Sergi 2014).

[31] Sentence n. 403 of 4th May 2010.

[32] *LaPresse*. 2012. "Bloccata Gang Latinoamericana a Milano, Polizia Arresta 26 Persone," February 7. http://www.lapresse.it/bloccata-gang-latinoamericana-a-milano-polizia-arresta-26-persone.html (accessed August 28, 2017).

[33] For further information, see the press release of the Italian Police "Milano: Smantellata Gang 'latinos', Strage Di Cani Corrieri Della Droga." 2013, March 19. http://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/view/28673/ (accessed August 28, 2017).

Trinitario, Barrio18) have confirmed Latin gangs' presence and activity in Milan, pointing out also the gangs' alleged control of some urban areas as parks and squares (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2013; 2014; 2015). Moreover, the last anti-gang operations have revealed the potential transnational dimension of Latin street gangs in Milan, as frequent contacts with gang members in other countries (e.g., the U.S., Ecuador, El Salvador) have emerged from the extensive wiretap of gang members' conversations. Assessing the transnational dimension of local groups is relevant to the extent that allows to better understand whether local street groups carrying the same names, colors, symbols, and even rules—as the case of the Latin gangs appeared in Milan—are indeed the result of a collective gang migration or rather a migration of individuals. If the former situation was found to be the case, it would possibly mean that such groups have a certain degree of internal coordination allowing the gang to efficiently setting up new branches elsewhere. If, on the contrary, local Latin gangs were found to be groups *only* imitating their counterparts in other geographical regions (as the U.S. or Latin America), it would possibly mean that other social and group processes are in place, that is, such street gangs are not transnational criminal groups. This latter aspect has previously been described by scholars investigating gang glocalization, that is, that is, how globalization affects gangs, in other European cities. Investigating the transnational connections of the Latin Kings in Catalonia, Spain, Feixa and Romaní (2014, 94) have described the Latin Kings "as a gang, as a tribe, as an organization, as a family and, last but not least, as a transnational community". In this context, the global culture of the Latin King influences Latino individuals, who seek to be part of the gang because it provides its members with a strong group identity. Among other things, the gang acts as a "family [that may] be associated with a network of solidarity and mutual aid" (2014, 97). Gang glocalization has also been addressed by Van Hellemont and Densley (2019) through an empirical comparative analysis of Congolese gangs in Brussels and Afro-Caribbean gangs in London. The authors have stressed how global media and cultural transmission of ideas influence local groups. In this context, the authors argue that the behavior deserving attention of scholars should be on mythmaking activities and "symbolic violence [that] is essential to the creation of myth" (2019, 183).

This literature suggests paying specific attention to how globalization and global gang cultures influence local street groups, especially in the case of Latin gangs in Italy, whose

violent behavior has even been reported to the Parliament by the Italian Anti-Mafia Investigation Directorate (DIA) (DIA 2014; 2015; 2016). DIA reports have described the numerous incidents of street crimes perpetrated by Latin gangs and the law enforcement responses to tackle and disrupt criminal groups raising concerns over public safety. Latin gangs have shown signs of evolution into criminal organizations hierarchically organized and responsible for serious crimes, although the extent of this evolution has not been explored empirically.

2.5 Research problem

Gang research in Europe, and Italy for that matter, has long remained comparatively scarce. In the U.S., on the other hand, different types of gangs have been studied for more than a century. Scholars have investigated gang formation, gang membership, and gang proliferation in manifold settings. A notable part of the scientific debate has surrounded criminal activity as a key defining feature of gangs (Curry and Decker 1998; Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 2006; see also Esbensen et al. 2001). Recent consensus—that has been reached in the form of the Eurogang definition—comprises illegal activities of gang members as a key aspect in developing gang identity (Weerman et al. 2009). Literature exploring the relationship between gangs and crime has also provided detailed descriptions of gangs' typologies and organizational aspects (Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 1996; see also Spindler and Bouchard 2011), highlighting several indicators that relate to the organization of gangs (e.g. name, symbols, size, age range, type of crimes, territoriality, durability). Furthermore, increasingly more studies have recently addressed to what extent gangs are to be regarded as organized criminal groups (Decker 2001; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker and Curry 2002; Decker and Pyrooz 2014; Decker and Van Winkle 1995; Densley 2014; Gottschalk 2016; Kelly and Caputo 2005; Smith, Rush, and Burton 2013; Whittaker et al. 2019; see also Decker and Pyrooz 2015). Also, the evolvement of gangs has been considered with a view to organizational features and the seriousness of crimes committed by the gang (Densley 2014; Gottschalk 2016). Among other things, it is precisely the level of organization and specialization in committing crimes that has caught criminological interest.

Apart from criminal activity, also ethnicity can be described as a central matter of concern in studying gangs. Shared values, norms and cultural traditions constitute the base for the integrity, cohesion and identity of the gang. In this process, the ethnic background of individuals plays an important role in gang formation and proliferation, and this is also reflected in the fact that "gangs often form among new immigrant groups" characterized by social and economic marginalization (Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008, 15).

Over the past ten years, reports on ethnic gangs have increased in part of Southern Europe, especially on Latin American gangs in Spain and Italy. Cities as Barcelona, Spain, have received much attention from sociologists and scholars interested in studying the socio-cultural processes associated with Latin street group formation (Feixa et al. 2008; Feixa, Porzio, and Recio 2006; Feixa and Romaní 2014). Similarly, Latin street groups emerged in Italian cities as Genoa and Milan have been addressed by academics, though much of the work on the Italian context has merely remained qualitative and with a focus on aspects such as migration, social exclusion and ethnicity (Bugli 2009; Bugli and Conte 2010; Bugli, Meola, and Milanesi 2008; Cannarella, Lagomarsino, and Queirolo Palmas 2007; Conte and Bugli 2008; Queirolo Palmas 2009b; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005; Raspelli 2016). In this framework, Milan has emerged as being the Italian city most recently affected by Latin gang violence. In addition, Latin groups in Milan have been found by law enforcement authorities to have contacts with criminal groups in Latin America, raising debates over their transnational criminal nature. Nonetheless, to date no previous criminological research has addressed the formation, organizational features and criminal evolution of Latin gangs in Milan. The empirical investigation of characteristics of violent Latin groups in Milan therefore serves to shed the light on gangs' criminal activities, alleged transnational ties, and capability to effectively engage in organized crime. The enhancement of our understanding of the underlying processes characterizing such gangs is important to advance the criminological knowledge of these gangs with transnational roots and therefore to contribute to the academic literature on gangs and organized criminal groups. Research findings on criminal gangs in new contexts may also provide additional insight to design and implement more effective policies capable of combining coercive strategies with prevention and social integration approaches.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives of the research

The present study seeks to fill the gap identified in the literature through a case study of Latin American gangs in the city of Milan. In particular, the investigation addresses the following primary research question:

- ✓ *How do Latin street gangs form and evolve outside their context of origin?*

To answer the primary research question, the research investigates a set of three secondary research questions:

1. *What are the factors and processes associated with gang formation and gang joining?*
2. *What type of activities are gangs involved in and what organizational features do they have?*
3. *What type of criminal behavior do gang members engage in, and can gangs be regarded as organized criminal groups?*

Through the case study of Milan, the aim of the proposed research is to advance criminological knowledge on gangs identifying and assessing the processes involved in Latin gang formation outside their context of origin (Objective 1), gang organizational features and activities (Objective 2), and gang criminal involvement to highlight also similarities and differences across gangs and between gangs and organized criminal groups (Objective 3). The analysis relies on a mixed method approach comprising primary and secondary data. An investigation that uses mixed methods is not a simple combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, but rather a research design integrating the strengths of each method to answer specific research questions (Bachman and Brent 2013). In particular, the research design employed by this study consists of a multilevel mixed methods design with a convergent-parallel approach which involved the simultaneous collection of different but complementary qualitative and quantitative data (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017). The two types of methods are therefore not fully

independent, as some research questions requires the analysis and integration of results from both qualitative and quantitative data.

The research included the use of in-depth interviews with experts, community members and a former gang member to collect primary data consisting of rich information based on respondents' experience. Thematic content analysis was then employed to reveal and highlight the processes associated with Latin gang formation (Objective 1). In addition, data extracted from four police information reports and one pre-trial court order were analyzed both with qualitative and quantitative techniques. Content analysis of intercepted conversations reported in court and police files was employed to identify gang activities and gang organization (Objective 2). Social network analysis, correlation and statistical tests, and regression analyses were instead employed to investigate gangs and gang members' involvement in co-offending events, to finally assess the criminal nature of such groups (Objective 3).

The following paragraphs presents the main sections related with the identification and collection data sources, the methods employed in data analysis, and the limitations associated with the different types of data.

3.2 Data sources: in-depth interviews

The investigation of Latin gangs' formation in Milan relies on the analysis of primary qualitative data originating from in-depth interviews. This research method allows to collect and analyze the participants' own experience and information from their point of view (Seidman 2006).

In-depth interviews were preferred to other types of interviews (e.g. structured interviews, unstructured interviews) because this instrument permits to further explore the answers provided by the interviewee asking additional relevant questions. After a careful examination of the research instruments already available, as the Eurogang expert survey,[34] it was decided to build an *ad-hoc* set of questions to better guide the interviews with the experts identified. The different questions included topics commonly addressed by previous gang research (see ANNEX A). A total of 8 respondents took part in the

[34] For more details on the Eurogang expert survey, visit https://www.umsl.edu/ccj/Eurogang/pdf/Expert%20Survey.pdf.

project. The number of respondents, albeit small, provided the researcher with information on the processes associated with Latin gang formation as well as description of gang characteristics. Law enforcement officials, prosecutors, social workers, educators who worked closely on the issue of Latin gangs in Milan were contacted and interviewed, when consent was granted. Few members of the Latin American community, more precisely of the Salvadorian community, were also interviewed together with a former gang member, whose access and availability were granted through informal contacts established through a gatekeeper.

3.2.1 Sampling and data collection

The investigation employed a purposive sampling technique to identify and select "information rich" cases (i.e. participants) for the study (Patton 2002). Sampling strategies for qualitative methods are not as explicit, evident and well-established as for quantitative methods. For these reasons, purposive sampling strategies must refer to the objective of the research to overcome such challenges (Palinkas et al. 2015, 2). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with Latin gang formation in Milan, this research identified both criterion sampling and snowball sampling as the most appropriate forms of purposive sampling, as they consist of the selection of subjects based on their characteristics (Patton 2002). Participants were not only chosen based on their knowledge and experience, but also on their availability and interest in participating in the study (Bernard 2002). Although purposive sampling does not permit to generate a representative sample and qualitative methods do not allow generalizability, this sampling strategy and the thematic content analysis of interview data served to give an in-depth understanding on Latin gangs.

Experts were identified through criterion sampling strategy, where the criterion referred to the role they held within their agency or institution (e.g. police investigator of foreign criminal organizations unit, honorary judge of the Juvenile Court of Milan). Criterion sampling, in fact, implies that the selection of individuals is based on fact that they possess relevant expertise on a particular phenomenon (Palinkas et al. 2015, 5–6). Experts of the Italian police and the judicial system as well as social workers were contacted with the support of two gatekeepers who facilitated the communication with

them through direct contact. In some cases, gatekeepers were essential for establishing a fruitful contact with the agency or the organization and gain access to further conduct the interview (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007; Seidman 2006).

With regard to the members of the community, a systematic online search of Latin American cultural associations active in Milan was performed to identify the most suitable associations to be contacted. Relevant cultural associations were identified based on the nationality of gang members previously identified and/or arrested (e.g. Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador). Of five associations contacted, a cultural association of Salvadorian immigrants showed interest in the research. A long-term communication established with the association and developed over a period of more than four months ensured the researcher's credibility with a member of the association who was interviewed and also served as a gatekeeper. In this case, a snowball sampling strategy was employed, asking upon the completion of the interview whether it was possible to identify other individuals who would participate in the study (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). This strategy led to the inclusion of two participants, one other from the cultural association and a former member of the MS13 convicted for gang-related crimes and who had recently re-established some contacts with the association after serving time in prison.[35] These three interviews were conducted in Spanish, the respondents' mother tongue, to facilitate their answers and avoid misinterpretation due to linguistic differences. The interviews were translated into English, a process which may lead the researcher to face the complexity of translation. Nonetheless, conducting the interview in the participant's mother tongue, when the researcher is also fluent in that language, honors that language and permits to report segment of the interview in the original language (Seidman 2006).

Individuals of the cultural association and the former gang member provided details only on the processes associated with the formation of the *maras* in Milan, therefore not contributing to the overall analysis on Latin gangs (i.e. gangs from other Latin American countries, as the Latin King from Ecuador). Nonetheless, the remaining interviews involved the major experts on the topic in Milan, whose different approaches and points of view—combined with the in-depth knowledge of community members and former

[35] Although the former gang member did not possess the knowledge to inform about the overall factors leading to gang formations in Milan, he provided unique insights into the life of a Salvadorian immigrant who became involved in gang-related crimes and violence once arrived in the city. This interview therefore resembles a life-history, as a greater flexibility was given to let topics of discussion emerge.

gang members—allowed to draw a comprehensive and complex picture of the phenomenon (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). The total number of participants (n = 8), albeit small, permitted to highlight and reveal the most central themes emerged about the processes involved in gang formation, the first objective of this case study. Additionally, in qualitative research there is not a definitive number of participants to be recruited for interviews (Seidman 2006). Table 2 provides a brief description of the respondents who took part in the study.

Table 2. Participants in research interviews

Expertise, role, or description
Police Investigator (Mecenate Police Station of Milan)
Honorary Judge (Juvenile Court of Milan)
Social Worker (Social Service Office for Minors)
Social Educator (Social Cooperative)
Social Educator*
Community Member (Salvadorian Cultural Association)
Community Member (Salvadorian religious community)
Former gang member

**Preferred not to disclose any information related with his/her professional affiliation*

Half of the interviews were recorded with a digital audio device and were transcribed to code their content with qualitative thematic content analysis. Recording qualitative interviews allows the researcher to focus on the participant with active listening (Edwards and Holland 2013). In two occasions it was not possible to record the interview and careful notes were taken and reorganized in interview reports. Finally, in one occasion the respondent preferred to reply to the answers through a text document so that he could provide more extensive and thoughtful answers to the topics he had more experience on.

The set of questions sought to bring to the discussion relevant topics related with gang formation and life in the gang. In some occasions the questions were distributed beforehand to allow the participant to know in advance the content of the interview. In few other occasions the informed consent and the interview guide were brought directly to the interview (see ANNEX A). All participants agreed on being interviewed and their consent was either recorded, provided orally or provided through email exchanges (in which informed consent was attached). Informed consent allows participants to know

enough about the research to decide whether they want to participate and be interviewed (Seidman 2006, 61).[36] All data were stored in a private folder and protected with a password and used solely for the purpose of this research.

3.3 Data sources: police reports and judicial documents

The first police record of Latin gangs in Milan dates back to June 2004, when a juvenile Ecuadorian reported to the police that she had been victim of extortion by three members of the Latin King, a Latin street gang that she had previously joined (Tribunale Ordinario di Milano 2010).[37] In November 2004, five members of the Latin King were reported for being responsible for serious and violent crimes (i.e., kidnapping and sexual assault). Further investigations targeted other types of offenses committed by Latino immigrants and allowed law enforcement authorities to collect more information on Latin youth groups. In June 2005, fifteen months after the beginning of the investigation, the police had collected enough evidence to conclude that separated crime events were interconnected. In fact, the investigated crimes had been committed by members of Latin street gangs, groups of Latinos with an internal hierarchy, rules and affiliation rituals (Tribunale Ordinario di Milano 2010). Ever since, major police investigations were carried out against Latin groups to dismantle their presence in Milan and other Italian cities.

In the Italian criminal justice system, at the end of the investigation the police file a final information report to the Public Prosecutor, who subsequently files a request to the Judge of Preliminary Investigation (GIP) for an order to remand the suspects in custody. The GIP evaluates the criminal evidence against the suspects and/or criminal groups and issues a pre-trial detention order motivating the decisions. Police information reports and pre-trial court orders contain rich source of data, as photos and intercepted communications between suspects which can be examined to assess the main topics and

[36] While it is preferable to have an informed consent signed by the participant, in most interviews this formal procedure would have increased the lack of collaboration, as most of particpants had already been difficult to approach.

[37] As reported in the document referring to the trial proceeding of the first instance. In Italy, the criminal proceeding takes place in three stages: the first instance (Court of Assise, Collegiate Court, Single Judge Court, and Justice of the Peace), the Appeal, and the Court of Cassation (the highest Court). For further details, see https://canestrinilex.com/en/readings/trial/.

activities discussed. If the suspects belong to a criminal group, as a street gang, the analysis of wiretap data can also serve to reconstruct the activity of the group (Morselli 2009). For each offender, personal details as the name, birth date, place and country of birth are reported. Furthermore, the documents contain information on the committed crimes, with the date of crime event, the place of occurrence, the offender or co-offenders involved and the victims. Information on gang affiliation, roles and tasks performed within the group may also be reported. Because of the type of included data, police information reports and judicial documents represent suitable case studies to analyze the organizational structure and criminal behavior criminal groups (see Berlusconi 2013).

A three-stage approach was implemented to identify and retrieve police reports and/or judicial documents on Latin street gangs in Milan. 1) Firstly, a systematic search of newspaper articles and police media press releases was carried out to categorize relevant anti-gang operations.[38] The search returned the name of major police operations conducted between 2006 and 2016 together with the names of the prosecutors in charge of each investigation.[39] 2) Secondly, a personal contact with a Police Inspector allowed to obtain contact details of prosecutors who were lately contacted to get access to the pre-trial court orders.[40] In this phase the priority was given to the retrieval of judicial documents rather than police information reports because the latter are restricted documents whose access requires formal agreements. Pre-trial court orders, instead, are publicly available documents without restricted access once the police investigation phase has terminated. Four pre-trial court orders were obtained after several meetings with different prosecutors. A close examination of the documents revealed that not all the documents included the same level of details on the criminal evidence collected against Latin gangs. Some pre-trial court orders consisted of several hundred pages while others contained only few dozen pages. (3) A third phase of document retrieval was therefore

[38] For more information on the website of the Italian State Police posting press releases, see http://www.poliziadistato.it/archivio/category/1298.

[39] The first police operation conducted in 2006 follows the final police information report filed in 2005 (see Table 3). For more information, see http://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/13129-Immigrazione_baby_gang_sudamericane_decine_di_arresti_a_Milano/.

[40] GIP were not considered to retrieve the judicial files because their names were often not reported in the news accessed online. The prosecutors' name, instead, were almost always mentioned in the articles. Pre-trial court orders can also be obtained by filing a formal request to the Criminal Court, in this case the Court of Milan. However, in practice it is often difficult to retrieve relevant documents through this procedure as judicial files are not archived in a digital database.

carried out in the attempt to obtain police information reports of those investigations with the aim of ensuring the comparability of results across different case studies. Police information reports, in fact, usually contain more data than pre-trial court orders, as the latter are subjected to the valuation of the GIP who may filter out information not relevant for the trial. Formal requests were filed to the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Police Headquarter of Milan to be granted access to police information reports, in compliance with EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). A meeting with a police deputy chief allowed to retrieve all information reports issued by the police of Milan against Latin gangs over the period 2005-2016 (on getting access to criminal justice data, see Trulson, Marquart, and Mullings 2004).

After a careful examination and cross-check of all documents retrieved, four police information reports and one pre-trial court order were deemed relevant case studies for the purpose of this research: Operation *Street fighters* (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2005), Operation *Mareros* (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2012), Operation *Amor de Rey* (Tribunale Ordinario di Milano 2013; Tribunale per i Minorenni di Milano 2013),[41] Operation *Trinitario* (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2013; 2014),[42] Operation *Barrio 18* (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2015).[43]

[41] The analyses performed on this case study relied on a dataset merging data extracted from two pre-trial court orders: one issued by the Court of Milan and one issued by the Juvenile Court of Milan.

[42] Operation *Trinitario* consists of a first police information report filed in 2013 and a second one filed in 2014 after the occurrence of additional gang-related crimes.

[43] Other police operations were excluded from this study for different reasons. Operation *Nuove Leve* (2011) against the local Latin gangs of Latin Dangers and Los Brothers was excluded because of lack of comparability with the other case studies selected. In fact, the police file was very short (45 pages) and did not contain wiretap conversations. Operation *Secreto* (2012) was excluded because it led to Operation *Amor de Rey* (2013), a larger and broader investigation addressing also the information reported in the former operation.

Table 3. Selected case studies on Latin street gangs in Milan, 2005-2016

Operation	Date of issue of document	Type of document	Length of investigation	Main gangs involved	Main nationality	N. of people investigated	Most serious crimes investigated
Barrio 18	21/05/2015	Police report	11 months	Barrio18	El Salvador	25	Unlawful association to commit a crime, attempted murder, aggravated robbery
*Trinitario**	27/06/2013 (20/03/2014)*	Police report	20 months	Trinitarios	Dominican Republic	27	Unlawful association to commit a crime, attempted murder, aggravated robbery
*Amor de Rey***	25/02/2013	Pre-trial court order	11 months	Latin King Chicago Latin King Luzbel Trebol Netas	Ecuador Ecuador/Peru Ecuador/Peru Ecuador	75	Unlawful association to commit a crime, attempted murder, drug trafficking, illegal possession of firearms, robbery, extortion
*Mareros****	31/10/2012 (03/08/2015) (22/11/2016)	Police report	11 months	MS13	El Salvador	42	Unlawful association to commit a crime, attempted murder, extortion, aggravated robbery, illegal possession of weapons
Street fighters	04/08/2005	Police report	8 months	Latin King Comando	Ecuador Peru	29	Unlawful association to commit a crime, attempted murder, rape, extortion, aggravated robbery, illegal possession of weapons

***** *See footnote 42.*
****** *Since Operation Amor de Rey is a case study analyzed through a pre-trial court order issued by the GIP (and not a police report), the number of people involved and the most serious crimes refer to the number of people charged and the crimes they were charged for, respectively.*
*****Few years after Operation Mareros, the police conducted two additional investigations against MS13 members.*

Table 3 provides a summary of the main information for each operation. The five case studies cover the entire period of Latin gangs' activity in Milan and allow to investigate their level of organization and their involvement in criminal activity. Each case study contains detailed information on the types of gang/s under investigation and the crimes for which gang members were investigated and/or charged. In particular, these documents refer to law enforcement activities investigating and/or charging Latin groups as *Unlawful association to commit a crime* (Art. 416 of the Italian Criminal Code).

TYPES OF GANGS

- Transnational Latin street gangs

The term *transnational* may refer either to gangs operating across countries or to gangs present in different countries. Some gangs have recently been labelled as transnational criminal organizations, as the case of the *maras* (U.S. Department of Justice 2017).[44] Although the literature does not support the notion that such gangs operate transnationally or have criminal contacts at transnational level (Balmaceda 2007; Wolf 2010; 2012), information reported in the selected case studies show that some gangs had frequent transnational contacts with the same gang in other countries. For this reason, this study uses the term *transnational* to refer to those Latin gangs in Milan who are also present in other countries. These gangs are the main focus of this study. This is the case of the Latin King and the Latin King Chicago, known for their long tradition and established internal structure, the Netas, the Trinitarios, and two Salvadorian gangs, the MS13 (also known as *La Mara Salvatrucha*) and Barrio18 (also known as MS18, *Dieciocho* or 18th Street), known for being particularly violent. The analysis of intercepted conversations reveals the extent to which Latin gangs have a transnational nature with regard to criminal activity and/or contacts with gang members abroad.

- Local Latin street gangs

The term *local* refers to Latin street gangs whose members are from Latin American countries but whose presence has only been observed in the city of Milan. These gangs therefore can be considered as local groups who have emerged in Milan as a form of

[44] The term *maras* is used to refer to *pandillas*—the general term used for Latin gangs—as MS13 and Barrio18, whose members are from Central American countries.

aggregation among young Latino immigrants. Local gangs addressed by the selected case studies include the Comando, the Trebol and the Latin King Luzbel, a faction of the transnational gang of the Latin King mostly composed of juveniles.

OFFENCE OF UNLAWFUL ASSOCIATION TO COMMIT A CRIME

The Italian Criminal Code (ICC), at article 416, states:

> "*When three or more persons associate in order to commit several criminal offences, those promoting or setting up or organizing such association shall be liable, for this sole offence, to imprisonment for 3 to 7 years.*
> *For the sole fact of participating in the association, the punishment shall be imprisonment for 1 to 5 years.*
> *Those directing the association shall be liable to the same punishments as those promoting it.*
> *If the participants in the association carry out armed raids of the country or of the public roads, the punishment shall be imprisonment for 5 to 15 years.*
> *The punishment shall be increased if the association includes ten or more persons.*"[45]

It is worth to stress that the charge for unlawful association to commit a crime indicates that, at least during the investigation and/or the pre-trial phase, investigators gathered enough evidence on individuals' criminal involvement within a structured criminal group. From a legal perspective, there are three essential elements for the configuration of the unlawful association to commit a crime:

1. The **stability** of the **associative bond** that is not limited to the commission of only one or more predetermined crimes and that therefore may last after their commission.
2. The **organizational structure** functional to the realization of the unlawful association's criminal program. The organizational structure is intended as the awareness of each associate to be part of the association, that is, it does not necessarily have to shape the group as a criminal organization with a formal structure with internal hierarchies and/or precise roles.

[45] The English translation is provided by the online knowledge management portal for Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime (SHERLOC), developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC). For more information, see https://www.unodc.org/cld/v3/sherloc/.

3. The **indeterminacy** of the **criminal program** or the prefiguration of an indeterminate series of crimes.[46]

The main charge for art. 416 of the ICC allowed to select comparable case studies. However, the intent of this doctoral dissertation is not to analyze Latin gangs in Milan through the lens of the legal definition of a criminal association. This study is rather a criminological investigation applying the Eurogang definition (see section 1.1).

3.3.1 Description of the case studies

The case studies address multiple gangs responsible for different types of crimes against rival gang members or non-Latin American individuals, including: violent crimes, property crimes, drug-related crimes and illegal carrying of weapons. All investigations lasted several months, led to the arrest of 25 to 75 individuals mostly from Latin American countries and aimed at revealing gangs organizational structure as well as tackle their involvement in offending (see Table 3). To date, these case studies represent the most relevant operations against Latin gangs in Italy, as the same degree of organization and offending have not been observed in other Italian cities where these gangs are present (i.e. Genoa and Torino).[47] The following sections briefly describe each case study to provide a comprehensive overview of the sources selected for the analyses.

- Operation *Street fighters*

Operation *Street fighters* is the first police operation conducted against Latin street gangs in Milan in 2006. The operation follows an eight-month investigation started in 2005 and targeting two Latin gangs: the Latin King and the Comando. Law enforcement activities included the review and analysis of previously reported crimes involving Latin American individuals (i.e. between March 2004 and June 2005) and the wiretapping of conversations between few Latinos believed to be important gang members. The surveillance lasted between January and June 2005 (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2005).

[46] For an extensive discussion and comments on the art. 416 of the Italian Criminal Code, see (Gaito, Romano, and Ronco 2018); see also https://www.brocardi.it/codice-penale/libro-secondo/titolo-v/art416.html.

[47] Personal communication with the police deputy chief of Milan.

The close examination of previously reported crimes revealed that such crime incidents had some common aspects:

- ✓ the recurrence of some offenders;
- ✓ the shared ethnic background of offenders and victims (i.e. citizens of Latin American countries) and their young age;
- ✓ the fact that most of these crime incidents were investigated because the police intervened (e.g. during a street fight) and not because they had been reported by the victims.

The 66 intercepted conversations revealed the type of activities the two gangs were involved in. The gangs were mainly involved in between gang fights, the organization and attendance of gang meetings, and the recruitment of new members, who were asked to pay weekly dues to the leader. Other criminal activities included the unlawful possession of bladed weapons.

- Operation *Amor de Rey*

Operation *Amor de Rey*[48] is the largest investigation among the selected case studies and targeted mainly four gangs: the Latin King, divided in the factions of Chicago and Luzbel, the Netas and the Trebol. The peculiarity of this judicial file lies in the fact that it is the only selected case study addressing four gangs, two transnational and two local, all of which have been found to have essential elements of unlawful associations. Three attempted murders were identified as a result of between gang fights. With Operation *Secreto* (2012), the law enforcement agencies apprehended the gang members responsible for such violent crimes. In the subsequent months, authorities continued to monitor Latin gang activities in Milan and eventually conducted the larger Operation *Amor de Rey* in 2013. Among the gangs investigated, the Latin King Chicago were particularly involved in street-level crimes (e.g. drug dealing, street fighting) as well as in transnational crimes as drug trafficking. The investigation led to the seizure of 1.5 kilos of cocaine that had been imported through international contacts with Colombian narco-traffickers. The

[48] Operation *Amor de Rey* was conducted on 25/02/2013, while Operation *Mareros* on 18/07/2013. For this reason, it was decided to describe each case study following the chronological order of the two operations rather than the chronological order of issue of the documents collected, as showed in Table 3. In fact, Operation *Mareros* came after Operation *Amor de Rey*, but for the former investigation the researcher was able to collect the police information report while for the latter only the pre-trial court order, which is issued afterwards.

police also found evidence of illegal possession of firearms (i.e. short guns) belonging to members of the allied gangs of Latin King Chicago and Netas. Operation *Amor de Rey* is the largest investigation of Latin gangs in Milan both in terms of number of people arrested (n = 75), and number of juveniles involved (n = 18, 24%). Members of other gangs are also present in the pre-trial court order. For some gangs (e.g. the Latin King New York, the Bloods), the investigators did not find enough evidence to charge their members for being part of an unlawful association. For other gangs, law enforcement conducted separate investigations specifically targeting such groups (i.e., Operation *Mareros* for the MS13, Operation *Trinitario* for the Trinitarios).

- Operation *Mareros*

Operation *Mareros* is the first police operation conducted against Salvadorian gangs in Milan, namely the MS13. The investigation started in December 2011, after an Ecuadorian juvenile reported to the police that she had been victim of a robbery by members of the MS13. During the investigation, police gang experts[49] observed that Latin gangs had been improving the organization of their groups with the aim of reproducing similar *modus operandi* of their Northern American and Latin American counterparts (Questura di Milano - Squadra Mobile 2012). This operation confirmed the presence of several Latin gangs in the city, whose activity resulted in several crimes committed in public space (i.e. parks, squares, subway stations, areas nearby schools). Serious and violent crimes as extortion, aggravated robbery, and attempted murder were often aggravated by trivial reasons, identified by the investigators as between gang fights. Beside violent crimes, this investigation revealed that the MS13, similarly to what was observed in Operation *Amor de Rey*, was a structured group whose leaders pretended the payment of weekly dues from members to economically sustain the group.

- Operation *Trinitario*

Operation *Trinitario*, as the name suggests, targeted the group known as Trinitarios, a street gang composed mainly of individuals from the Dominican Republic. The investigation started in November 2011 after an Ecuadorian citizen reported to the police that he had been victim of a robbery perpetrated by three members of the Trinitarios. As

[49] A group of law enforcement experts on Latin gangs was formed after Operation *Street fighters* with the aim of monitoring Latin gangs in Milan.

for the other gangs mentioned thus far, the investigation revealed that the Trinitarios had a fair level of internal organization, with leadership roles, payment of dues and regular meetings. Criminal activities constituted an essential part of the gang life and were aimed at both the financial sustainment of the group (e.g., drug-related crimes) and at the control of the territory against rival gangs (e.g., attempted murder).

- Operation *Barrio 18*

Operation *Barrio 18* is the last and most recent major police operation conducted against Latin gangs in Milan. The investigation revealed that the Salvadorian gang of Barrio18 had a fair organizational structure (with leaders, regular meetings, and payment of weekly dues) and was involved in violent and street-level crimes, including attempted murder, aggravated robbery and drug dealing. In line with all previous gangs described, the Barrio18 was highly involved in between gang fights, mostly assaults towards the MS13.

3.3.2 Data collection and data cleaning

The accurate examination of the documents collected allowed to identify and select comparable sources to investigate different Latin groups involved in criminal behavior in Milan. The selected case studies (i.e., police investigations) contain information one or more Latin gangs against which law enforcement collected criminal evidence for their prosecution as unlawful association to commit a crime. The crimes investigated therefore can be labelled as gang-related crimes, as they were perpetrated by individuals belonging to a gang and for purposes strictly related to serving the interest of the group.

In-depth reading of each case study led to the categorization of key information through an extensive process of data coding which permitted to convert raw texts into organized data for subsequent analyses. For each case study, relevant information was organized into three datasets: individual attributes dataset, and two relational datasets, namely conversations and co-offending.[50] The individual attributes dataset contains socio-demographic data on individuals charged for gang-related crimes or any person

[50] The type of data can be referred to as relational data, as in most of the cases the police were able to monitor and identify conversation participants as well as individuals involved in co-offending crimes, i.e. crime perpetrated by more than one person.

who appeared in the intercepted conversations. More specifically, the dataset was built including general information on gang members (e.g., name, family name, nickname, country of birth, gender, date of birth, gang affiliation, role within the gang) and other individuals identified. Each person was assigned an alphanumeric ID, which allowed to prevent his/her identification and ultimately served to link each individual to the conversations dataset and co-offending dataset. The conversations dataset contains data on wiretapped conversations, including the date of the telephone call (or SMS, date of conversation in case of wiretap data obtained through spy bugs or other means), the number and identity of the participants (reported using the same ID of the attributes dataset), the gang membership and gang role of participants, and the type of activities discussed. The co-offending dataset contains data on crimes committed by more than one person and includes information related to the date of crime, [51] place, type of crime, and number and identity of offenders and victims (reported using the same ID of the attributes dataset).[52]

The three datasets initially built for each case study were eventually merged into three final datasets which contain relevant information extracted from all the selected case studies on individuals' attributes, activities discussed in wiretapped conversations and co-offending events. The merge allowed to correct mistakes, inconsistencies, and to properly identify some individuals (e.g. some were only mentioned superficially in one case study while they were charged in another investigation). Ultimately, this procedure has allowed to have a better comprehension of the nature, complexity, and reliability of the data (on this aspect, see also Rostami and Mondani 2015). Table 4 shows the type of variables included in each final dataset.

[51] The majority of the crimes committed by gang members or individuals offending with gang members were co-offending crimes. There were few occasions of crimes committed by solo offenders. For the purpose of this research, such crimes were excluded from the analysis.

[52] More information about the data cleaning process are provided in the subsection "Data cleaning: individual attributes, conversations and co-offending dataset" in APPENDIX A.

Table 4. Individual, co-offending, and conversations dataset and related variables

Dataset	Data	
Individual attributes	• Alphanumeric ID • N. of police operations in which the ID appears • Police operation (e.g. Amor de Rey) • Name, family name, nickname • Sex, date of birth, country of birth • Kinship or relationship ties with other ID(s) • Information on charge for unlawful association to commit a crime (art. 416) • Information on whether the charge was handled by the juvenile justice system	• Information on whether the ID was involved in co-offending • For co-offenders, information on offending (retrieved from co-offending dataset: N. of co-off. crimes, data first/last offense, N. of violent/property/weapons & drugs crimes) • Information on victimization • Information on criminal history • Gang-related information (membership, subgroup, role) • Information on type of activities discussed/perpetrated (retrieved from conversations dataset) • Additional information (e.g. residence status)
Conversations	• ID of each segment of conversation (i.e. category) and ID of each conversation (see section 3.5.2) • Police operation of intercepted conversation • Date and time of conversation • ID of each participant in the conversation (retrieved from individual attributes dataset)	• Gang membership and gang role if each participant (retrieved from individual attributes dataset) • Gang conversation (e.g., MS13, or between gang if the participants have different membership) • Type of activities discussed (coded as theme, subtheme, and category, see section 3.5.2)
Co-offending	• ID of each event • Date and place of crime • Crime type (property, drugs, weapons, violent, murder/att. murder; see Table 22 in APPENDIX A) • ID of each co-offender (retrieved from individual attributes dataset)	• N. of offenders and victims • Mean age of offenders and victims • Sex and role of offenders and victims • N. of different gangs involved • Information on whether the crime was a between gang fight

The final individual attributes dataset contains information on 632 people, of whom 50% (n = 317) were identified as belonging to Latin gangs. As for the conversations dataset, the final number of unique individuals identified accounted to 364, for a total of 1,311 conversations (for further details on this dataset, see 3.5.2). As for the co-offending dataset, 232 individuals identified in the individuals dataset participated in co-offending events.[53] Co-offenders belonging to less relevant gangs (or non-gang co-offenders) were subsequently excluded to analyze only members of one of the nine major gangs for which data was available as they were the primary target of the investigations. The final number of relevant gang co-offenders used for the analyses account to 200 individuals, involved in a total of 142 co-offending events.[54] Table 5 summarizes the main socio-demographic and crime-related variables of gang co-offenders.

Table 5. Subset of gang co-offenders used for the analyses (n = 200)

Variable	**%**	***Category and description***
Sex	95.5	Male
Ethnicity	60.5	South American
	37.5	Central American
	2.0	Other (i.e. Europe, Asia)
Decade of birth	61.0	1990s
	33.5	1980s
	5.5	1970s
Criminal history	29.5	Yes (convicted/arrested)
Leadership role	34.0	Yes (Leader, Underboss, High-ranking official)
Juvenile at first offense	28.0	Yes (14-17 years old)
Crimes with gang members sharing a tie	11.0	Yes (blood, kinship, or relationship tie)
Between gang crimes	73.5	Yes (crime against a rival gang)
Crimes with other gangs	29.5	Yes (crime committed with members of other gangs)
Murder/attempted murder	53.0	Yes

The majority of offenders were males (95.5%), with a prevalence of South Americans (60.5%) over Central Americans or citizens of other countries. More than half gang co-

[53] This figure does not include 36 individuals who were charged for being part of an unlawful association to commit a crime but were nonetheless never involved in co-offending crimes.

[54] To perform the analysis at individual and group (i.e. gang) level, information from the individual attributes and co-offending dataset were merged, to link crime data with socio-demographic and gang-related data for each offender.

offenders were born in the 1990s (61%), and nearly a third had a criminal history (29.5%). Members with leadership roles accounted for the 34% of co-offenders and nearly a third of the sample committed the first recorded co-offense while still a juvenile (28%) and in alliance with members of other gangs (29.5%). Interestingly, a small yet relevant proportion of offenders participated in crimes with members with shared kinship (or relationship) tie (11%), while half of the offenders were involved in murder/attempted murder (53%). Co-offending events were predominantly the result of between gang feuds and this is highlighted by the fact that 73.5% of offenders participated in at least a crime against rival gang members. Lastly, more than half of gang co-offenders (53%) were involved in at least one murder or attempted murder.

The conceptualization of the variables related to individuals' gang membership and role contained in the individual attributes dataset are discussed in the following subsection.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GANG MEMBERSHIP AND GANG ROLE

The identification of gang membership has long been debated in the literature, with a particular focus on measures (e.g. self-nomination) to properly identify gang members (see Esbensen et al. 2001). In this research, gang membership was assigned to individuals based on the information contained in each case study and in line with the adopted Eurogang definition (see section 1.1). Gang membership therefore was not restricted to those individuals investigated or charged for being part of a criminal gang (i.e. in legal terms, an unlawful association to commit a crime), as the police did not always gather enough evidence to charge all suspected individuals. The identification of gang membership also relied on accounts of informants, surveillance activities and/or knowledge from previous investigations, or statements of individuals (or made by rival gang members) on their affiliation made either to the prosecutor during interrogations or emerging from intercepted conversations. The combination of different sources allowed to accurately identify gang members regardless of the law enforcement perspective, thus reducing the potential bias of adopting the criminal charge as the only measure of gang

membership.[55] This approach ultimately permits to have a broader picture of the gangs present in Milan in a given period, although some gangs emerge only marginally.

With regard to gang members' role, it is the only variable of the individual attributes dataset which required an extensive data cleaning process after the data entry. The reason is twofold: first, there is the role identified by prosecutors based on the criminal code; second, there is the internal role gang members held within their group which does not necessarily correspond to the one they were prosecuted for. On the one hand, in fact, based on the evidence collected, the prosecutors indicted individuals for being either leaders/promoter or participants of the unlawful association, as per the Italian Criminal Code (see section 3.3.1). On the other hand, most Latin gangs have internal roles and tasks assigned to members who have proved their criminal skills and loyalty to the gang. Clearly, these gang internal roles do not precisely overlap with the label of leader or participant reported in the criminal code. Most Latin gangs had subdivision of tasks for individuals with leadership status; few others only had leaders and underbosses leadership roles, thus a less complex hierarchical structure (e.g., as the case of the Neta and the Trebol). Detailed information on gang roles emerged in intercepted conversations in which individuals spoke freely about their tasks. For these reason, the investigators were often capable to also reconstruct the gang internal structure with specific roles and tasks assigned to each individual. This ultimately resulted in having two types of variables related to the role held by gang members: *Formal_role* and *Gang_role*. The former variable refers to the role with whom gang members were charged as part of the unlawful association ("Leader/Promoter" or "Participant"). The latter variable is the role gang members held within their group and emerged through intercepted conversations or described in the *manifesto* (i.e. gang written rules) seized by the police. Different gang roles were grouped into four categories, three related to leadership roles and one to individuals with no specific tasks:

- *Leader:* management of the gang, organization of meeting, assignment of gang roles and tasks, instructions and orders to gang members;
- *Underboss:* advisor of the leader, organization and management of the gang;

[55] For instance, of the 75 individuals charged in Operation *Amor de Rey*, only 63 were actually charged for unlawful association to commit a crime. The inclusion of additional information permitted to identify a total of 142 gang members, some belonging to gangs not even directly tackled by this operation.

- *High-ranking official:* advisor of the leader, role subordinated to the leader and underboss but high rank that allows to give orders and control affiliates. Include duties related to the collection and management of weekly dues, the management of the gang archives and teaching of the rules to affiliates;
- *Affiliate:* no specific duties and tasks assigned (i.e. footsoldiers, mostly new members).

A variable named *Role_CLEAN* was built to store the final values of gang members' roles, result of the data cleaning and transformation process. In this regard, the individual's gang role was preferred to the role identified by the judicial authorities to prosecute gang members. For instance, if a gang member was prosecuted as a "Leader" but in fact held an "Underboss" role within the gang, the role for that member was coded as "Underboss". In other cases, gang members were prosecuted as "Participant"—possibly because not enough evidence was found to prosecute them as "Leader"—though they had a gang leadership role (e.g. high-ranking official), which was properly coded. Moreover, individuals with no gang roles and/or prosecuted as "Participant" were coded as affiliates. Finally, individuals who were not charged but who were identified as being gang members with either leadership or affiliate roles were assigned that role (for an example of data cleaning, see Table 17 in APPENDIX A). The validity of this coding procedure was further confirmed by the final comparison between *Formal_role* and *Role_CLEAN*, which revealed that all individuals charged as "Leader" held a leadership role within the gang. More importantly, the comparison highlighted that ~80% of individuals charged as "Participant" were indeed "Affiliate", though the remaining ~20% had an actual gang leadership role which was properly accounted with the strategy adopted. Similarly, a total of 163 individuals were identified as gang members but not formally charged, though ~25% emerged as having a leadership role (see Table 18 in APPENDIX A).

3.4 Limitations of the data

As described in the previous section, the investigation of Latin American gangs in Milan relied on a variety of sources to identify and assess the factors related to gang formation, gang organizational features and activities, and gangs' involvement in criminal behavior. The inquiry adopted a mixed methods research approach combining qualitative

and quantitative analyses of data extracted from primary sources (i.e. in-depth interviews) and secondary sources (i.e. police/judicial documents). Despite the rich information provided, these sources entail a number of limitations.

As for in-depth interviews, respondents were identified through purposive sampling technique, meaning that the selection of individuals was based on their availability and the fact that they possessed relevant expertise and/or knowledge on Latin gangs in Milan (Bernard 2002; Palinkas et al. 2015; Patton 2002). The qualitative analysis of interview data therefore suffers from issues related to sample selection and sample size. Firstly, the participants were not randomly selected, hence they had not the same probability of taking part in the study. This implies that the selection may have suffered from the researcher bias in establishing the criteria by which to identify the respondents. Secondly, the non-probability nature of the sample makes it difficult to assess the representativeness of the unit of selection, leading research results to be anchored to the knowledge of the targeted group and preventing the generalization of findings. Thirdly, it may be difficult to assess the validity (or trustworthiness) of the data collected, as the interaction between the researcher and the participants and their status as expert may have introduced bias in the answers (see Seidman 2006, 22–26). To reduce issues related to these limitations, the identification of individuals with expertise on Latin gangs in Milan relied on a systematic screening of open sources (e.g. newspaper articles, police media releases). This ensured, together with the snowball sampling technique employed after the first interviews, that most of the well-informed people were contacted (around 12 people were initially approached). Meetings with high-ranking police officers confirmed that, with regard to law enforcement and judicial authorities, the most relevant experts were interviewed. Similarly, social workers and educators who participated in the study were professionals in team leading positions and were therefore able to provide comprehensive information about their work with Latin groups. Lastly, data collection and analysis were validated cross-checking research findings with information contained in other documents, as newspaper articles, sociological literature, and textual data contained in the police/case studies (i.e. aspects related to gang formation emerged from prosecutors' interrogations of suspects and witnesses). As for sample size, the final group of respondents does not consist of a large number of participants. Informants provided the basis to reveal the processes associated with gang formation and gang joining, though more in-depth

interviews would provide additional perspectives (e.g., law enforcement, social works, community members, gang members) and would allow to validate research findings emerging from the qualitative analysis.

As for secondary sources, police and judicial documents have been extensively used to investigate organized criminal groups through content analysis and social network analysis (e.g., see Calderoni 2014b; Calderoni et al. 2016; Campana 2011; 2016; Morselli 2009; Natarajan 2000; 2006; Varese 2006; see also Calderoni 2014a). Literature on organized crime and street gangs has pointed out the potential issues related to the use of such data for the analysis of criminal groups (e.g., see Rostami and Mondani 2015). With regard to wiretap data, Campana and Varese (2012) have suggested to consider three criteria in the assessment of data reliability and validity. The first relate to the fact that individuals in intercepted conversations should talk freely about their criminal behavior or if they use an encrypted language the topics of discussion should nonetheless be comprehensible (see also Morselli 2009, 42–43). The second aspect has to do with group coverage, that is, the investigation must contain information about key individuals and activities of the criminal group. The third criteria relate to sample size of intercepted conversations. The two scholars have suggested several hundreds of conversations, wiretapped over several months of investigation. According to the criteria identified by Campana and Varese (2012), the investigation of Latin gangs in Milan relied on valid wiretap data. In fact, intercepted conversations were transcribed and translated (from Spanish) by police operators, and the content and meaning were identified even when individuals used and encrypted language. As for the group coverage, law enforcement surveillance may have not captured the entire gang network. However, police information reports and arrest warrants extensively reported intercepted conversations including criminal evidence against Latin gangs, therefore allowing to obtain a reliable picture of relevant criminal actors and gangs' criminal activities (Berlusconi 2013; Morselli 2009). Lastly, the datasets built using data extracted from each case study included hundreds of conversations (with the only exception of the first case study, i.e., Operation *Street Fighter*) intercepted during investigation lasting several months (see Table 3 of section 3.3).

Furthermore, comprehensiveness and accuracy of law-enforcement data may be influenced by police investigation strategies and allocated resources. This implies that the

analysis of co-offending networks may not capture the whole criminal activity of Latin gangs in Milan, as the study includes only co-offenses emerging from law enforcement investigations. Crimes may have not been recorded especially during the first years (i.e., time spans: 2004-2006, 2008-2010). In fact, in that period gangs were less involved in violent behavior and law enforcement authorities may have been less involved in extensive monitoring of such groups because concerns over public safety had not arisen yet. Moreover, the study of police/judicial documents resulted in the identification of criminal groups that are cross-sectional in nature, that is, represent a snapshot in time. The fluid and/or dynamic nature of gangs therefore was not captured by this research, though the evolvement of Latin gangs in Milan was provided through the analysis of co-offending events by time span (see section 4.2.1). Despite the limitations associated with law enforcement surveillance data, this investigation relied on all available crime data whose access was granted by police and judicial authorities. The systematic extraction of information on gang activities and gang members' involvement in co-offending events allowed to conduct the first comprehensive criminological investigation of Latin street gangs in Milan.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Thematic analysis of interviews

Interview data were comprehensively analyzed after having completed all interviews, although relevant topics related with Latin gang formation and activity already emerged after few interviews. This strategy avoided to impose specific meaning to some of the answers and contaminating the next interviews, while also permitting to maintain the focus on some recurrent and potentially crucial themes. Analysis of qualitative data consisted of four main phases, as highlighted by Hesse-Biber (2017): data preparation, data exploration, reduction of data, and interpretation.

The first phase of *data preparation* involved the transcription of tape-recorded interviews using a word-processing computer software. Audio files were therefore transformed into text files. Punctuation, emotional context, and nonverbal communications (e.g. body postures, pauses in the speech) of the interview were done carefully to ensure the accuracy of the so-called verbatim transcription (see Poland 1995).

The second phase of *data exploration* regarded a primary reading and subsequent readings of the transcripts to familiarize with the raw data, taking the first memos (i.e. annotations) to begin reflecting about the data, and writing a summary of the interview. The third phase of *reduction of data* consisted of reducing text data through an inductive rather than deductive approach which allowed themes to emerge from the data, as in grounded theory approach (see Braun and Clarke 2006, 83–84). Thematic analysis—a flexible method employed to identify, analyze and report themes emerging from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006)—begun with descriptive coding at the semantic or explicit rather than latent level. Descriptive coding assigned a label to important passages and also served to organize the data by topic (Hesse-Biber 2017; Saldaña 2013). In Vivo coding, i.e. codes created with the participant's actual words, were also employed to give importance and honor to the participant's voice (Saldaña 2013). During this process new files were created and irrelevant passages were discarded.[56] Data reduction through coding led to the creation of new documents with only compelling passages. Descriptive codes and qualitative data passages coded were then classified by major themes (Saldaña 2013; Wolcott 1994). Themes are intended as the "outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (Saldaña 2013, 175), and were checked and re-checked against the text passages. The fourth phase of *data interpretation* was the last phase of the process of data analysis. Interpreting the themes in light of the research questions and objectives allowed to highlight the processes associated with gang formation and important characteristics of gangs and gang members.

Lastly, some limitations to the data do exist. The findings are not generalizable beyond Latin gangs in Milan as the participants' expertise and experience is limited to this city. Furthermore, the purposive sampling techniques employed may have not led to the identification of all potentially relevant individuals. Nonetheless, a sufficient number of respondents took part in the research despite the fact that at the time of the interviews gang-related crime incidents and violence had already substantially declined.

[56] The original transcript was stored in a separate folder to go back to the raw interview material in case of necessity.

3.5.2 Content analysis of intercepted conversations

The conversations wiretapped by law enforcement and reported in the selected case studies were systematically investigated through content analysis to reveal Latin gangs' behavior, activities, and levels of organization. The analysis of criminal groups has particularly benefited from the use of wiretap data, with increasing studies employing different techniques (e.g. social network analysis, correspondence analysis, content analysis), especially in the field of organized crime (e.g., Berlusconi 2013; Calderoni 2012; 2014b; Morselli 2009; Natarajan 2000; 2006). The reason is twofold: firstly, wiretap data permits to safely analyze the activities discussed and carried out by the criminal groups of interest without any risk for the researcher; secondly, they likely contain information on key actors and individuals with more marginal roles, capturing the conversations occurring in their natural setting (Campana and Varese 2012, 15).

Scholars have suggested to employ content analysis as the first research tool to analyze criminal groups through wiretap data (Campana and Varese 2012). Despite being time-consuming and not always easy to conduct (Holsti 1969), content analysis allows to study and assess thematic units containing information on gang organizational features and gang activity, one of the main objective of this research.[57] As defined by Krippendorff (2004, 18), "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use". The inference made from content analysis is neither deductive (i.e. from general to particulars) nor inductive (i.e. from particulars to general), but rather *abductive.* "Abductive inferences proceed across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind to particulars of another kind" (2004, 36). Krippendorff also pointed out the advantages of employing content analysis. First of all, there is no contamination of data by the researcher, making it a "nonreactive or unobtrusive" research method (2004, 40). Secondly, unlike structured data—e.g., originating from surveys or structured interviews—data used in content analysis are unstructured, which allows to "preserve the conceptions of the data's sources" (2004, 41). Thirdly, content analysis allows to process and analyze large volumes of data (McIntosh and Cuklanz 2017).

[57] Although the type of content analysis employed in this study is mainly of qualitative nature, descriptive statistics will also be presented, to highlight the number of times each gang talked about a given topic.

Content analysis consists of different components, which may vary in order and importance depending upon the research. After having introduced the conversations dataset (see section 3.3.2), the following pages illustrate three main stages for data making, that is, preparing data usable for analysis (i.e. the creation of the dataset). The stages are: sampling, unitizing (or unit of analysis), and coding (Krippendorff 2004, 86).

SAMPLING

Purposive sampling technique was employed to extract a subset of meaningful conversations (i.e. exchange of information between two actively speaking actors) from the total number of contacts (e.g., very short telephone calls with only one actor speaking, or simply single SMS) reported in the case studies (see Table 19 in APPENDIX A). Unlike other types of sampling (e.g., random sampling), purposive (or relevance) sampling consisted in the selection of meaningful conversations within the overall number of intercepted contacts between actors, to further use content analysis on the extracts of the conversations. It is important to specify that, given the type of sources used, the intercepted conversations coded through the purposive sampling technique relate mainly to criminal activities, or licit or deviant activities nonetheless serving the purpose of the criminal group, as the organization of weekly meetings. Hence, the conversation datasets does not include data on the whole range of activities in which gangs were involved, but rather on gangs' deviant/behavior (on this aspect, see Campana and Varese 2012, 18).

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

This study used meaningful conversations as sampling units and segments included in the conversations as coding units. In other words, for each conversation the researcher identified single sentences (the coding units) about gang-related activities and mapped them into a set of categories for their classification (see "Coding" section below). This implies that each conversation was coded one or more times, depending on the number of different topics it contained (see Table 20 in APPENDIX A). Unlike previous research (e.g., see Campana 2011) which has used the whole conversation as both the sampling and coding unit, this study used segments of the conversation as the preferred coding unit. This strategy limited potential issues related with low inter-coder agreement (see "Coding" section below). In fact, preliminary tests of agreement between two raters

revealed that it was often difficult to unequivocally establish which was the single and major topic of discussion, as some conversations lasted long (e.g., more than 30 minutes) and individuals talked about many different gang activities. Final results of content analysis indeed showed that, for each case study, an important proportion of conversations (~30-40%) contained more than one segment of conversation relating to different gang activity, meaning that multiple topics were discussed (see Table 21 in APPENDIX A). While time consuming, this approach allowed to better capture all the relevant discussions concerning the life of the gang.

CODING

A proper coding strategy was identified to analyze wiretap data. "Coding is the transcribing, recording, categorizing, or interpreting of given units of analysis into the terms of a data language so that they can be compared and analyzed" (Krippendorff 2004, 220). The researcher, or coder/rater, employs a coding scheme when s/he sets and follows the rules for recording textual data. Clear instructions and guidelines not only reduce the subjectivity of the researcher but also allow others to replicate the analysis.

Of the two possible procedures applicable to the identification of the activities discussed by criminal groups (see Campana and Varese 2012), this study favored the bottom-up approach which let the themes emerge from the actual codification process. The top-down approach, in fact, requires to code the data with a pre-defined set of themes. This investigation employed the bottom-up approach in the first case study obtained and analyzed (i.e. Operation *Amor de Rey*) and applied the set of themes to the other case studies once the reliability of the coding guide was established (see section below related with reliability).[58] The combination of the bottom-up and top-down approach increased the reliability of the categories and themes coded (Campana and Varese 2012, 22). The coding guide was developed including the description of each category to assist the researcher during the decision making process, to keep the coding process clear and understandable, and therefore to ensure the reliability of decisions (Krippendorff 2004,

[58] Operation *Amor de Rey* was the first case study analyzed because of data availability (i.e. it was the first document for which access was granted), but it is also one of the most comprehensive investigation conducted against Latin gangs in Milan (and Italy), as it lasted several months and involved the surveillance of different gangs at the same time.

135–36).[59] Finally, four major themes were identified: 1) Criminal activity, 2) Conflict, 3) Group management, and 4) External relations. These themes aggregate a total of twelve sub-themes, in particular: the first theme includes *Criminal behavior* and *Weapons*; the second theme refers to *Outside gang confrontations*[60] and *Territory* subthemes; the third theme comprises the largest number of subthemes which are: *Recruitment rituals and symbols, Meetings, Financial sustainment, Punishment, Structure, Within gang issues*; the fourth and last theme includes subthemes referring to *Alliances* and *Local and transnational contacts.* The subthemes, which are presented in details in the chapter of results (section 4.1.2), aggregate a total of 22 categories (see Table 40 in ANNEX B). Themes, subthemes and categories constitute the attributes of each conversation in the conversations dataset (see Table 20 APPENDIX A).

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The last important aspect to consider when conducting content analysis is the reliability and validity of research results. Reliability implies consistency across researchers and is related with agreement on interpretation and coding of textual data (Hesse-Biber 2017). Validity in this study refers to the validity of the measurement instrument (the coding guide) and the validity of wiretap data (the conversations dataset).

Reliable results lead to replicability of research findings. Among the three types of reliability discussed by Krippendorff (2004, 214)—stability, reproducibility, and accuracy—the present study aimed to the reproducibility form of reliability, also referred to as *inter-coder reliability*. In fact, while stability is considered to be too weak because it only assesses inconsistencies of one researchers, reproducibility accounts for both intra-observer inconsistencies and inter-observer inconsistencies.[61] The author described

[59] If a conversation reported multiple segment of conversations related to the same category (e.g. drug-related crimes), the researcher coded that specific category only one time for that conversation. Rather than identifying the number of times the same topic recurred in the same conversation, the objective of this procedure was to identify and code all the different topics (discussed in different segments of conversation) emerged in the same conversation.

[60] While *Outside gang confrontations* often referred to between gang conflicts (i.e., the aim of gang members of assaulting rival members), it was decided to code it within the major theme of *Conflict* rather than *Criminal activity* (*Criminal behavior* subtheme) to keep this activity separated from other types of criminal activities (e.g., property crimes, drug-related crimes). The choice was also motivated by the importance that conflict with rival groups (and/or with the authorities) has for street gangs.

[61] Accuracy was not considered in this study as it was not possible to test reliability against standards set by experienced researchers in the field of content analysis.

reproducibility as "the degree to which a process can be replicated by different analysts working under varying conditions […]. Demonstrating reproducibility requires reliability data that are obtained under *test-retest* conditions" (2004, 215).

It was not possible to conduct the inter-coder reliability test on all case studies because of the highly confidential nature of the data. Thus, after the completion of the coding guide developed through in-depth reading of Operation *Amor de Rey*, the researcher first tested the validity of the coding instrument through extensive reading of the other case studies. When the initial draft of the coding guide was completed, the researcher asked for the collaboration of a research assistant to assess the reliability of the coding procedure, before moving independently onto coding the remaining four case studies.

The second rater was trained through initial meetings explaining the aim of the study, the type of data, and the coding guide (Table 40 in ANNEX B). The training and pilot tests ultimately served to provide enough information for independent coding to subsequently measure the level of agreement between the two coders. The case study (Operation *Amor de Rey*) was stored in a secured server, the access was granted only to the two coders, and the document was safely erased after the analysis.

In order to measure the inter-coder reliability, a 10% random sample of the conversations dataset was extracted. The second coder was granted access to the case study and was provided with the coding guide and an Excel coding sheet to perform content analysis on the subsampled conversations and the corresponding segments (Table 20 in APPENDIX A). A one-to-one coding procedure was followed (see Kirilenko and Stepchenkova 2016). Each conversation (the sample unit) was classified on each of the twelve dimensions (i.e. subthemes) that each coder identified as being discussed by people under surveillance. The dimensions, as included in the coding guide and introduced above, were: *Criminal Behavior, Weapons, Outside Gang Confrontations, Territory, Recruitment Rituals and Symbols, Meetings, Financial Sustainment, Punishment, Structure, Within Gang Issues, Alliances, Local and Transnational Contacts*.[62]

[62] Although it would have been possible to also perform one-to-multiple coding for identifying also second-tier dimensions (i.e. categories) for each conversation (see Kirilenko and Stepchenkova 2016), it was decided to test the reliability of content analysis only at the subtheme level. This strategy lies in the fact that a higher level of aggregation reduces reliability issues. Moreover, the subthemes were the preferred level of aggregation to present and discuss the results of gang activity and organization. The categories,

The reliability of the coding was then assessed comparing the two 10% random samples of coder 1 (the researcher) and coder 2 (the research assistant). To compute the inter-coder reliability, it was used the Cohen's Kappa (κ) coefficient which measures the agreement between two independent coders (J. Cohen 1960). Cohen's Kappa permits to measure the agreement for nominal variables and is defined as:

$$\kappa = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e}$$

where P_o is the proportions of observations agreement and P_e proportion of expected chance agreement (J. Cohen 1960; see also Viera and Garrett 2005). The coefficient can range from -1 to 1, with $\kappa = 1$ indicating perfect agreement, $\kappa = 0$ what would be expected by chance, and values below 0 that systematic disagreement may have occurred. Results of inter-coder agreement confirmed the reliability of coding and the applicability of the coding guide to the rest of the case studies.[63] Table 6 presents the results of the inter-coder agreement for each dimension.[64]

however, were kept in the coding guide to assist the researchers in coding the topics discussed in the intercepted conversations.

[63] The coefficients were computed in R using the *cohen.kappa* function from the *psych v.18.12* package.

[64] Initially, the most problematic dimensions to code were *Recruitment rituals and symbols, Within gang issues, Meetings, and Territory* as the first test of the coding guide with the second coder conveyed either fair or moderate agreement results (i.e. $0.21 \leq \kappa \leq 0.40$ and $0.41 \leq \kappa \leq 0.60$, respectively). The coding guide was then adjusted including more detailed explanations on how to identify the abovementioned dimensions and the second coder was provided further training. The results in Table 6 show that the final version of the coding guide led to better inter-coder agreements, though the coefficient remained relatively low for some dimensions (*Territory* and *Within gang issues*).

Table 6. Inter-coder reliability coefficients for 10% random sample of Operation *Amor de Rey*

Subthemes	Cohen's Kappa	Interpretation of κ*
1. Criminal behavior	0.76	Substantial agreement
2. Weapons	0.91	Almost perfect agreement
3. Outside gang confrontations	0.84	Almost perfect agreement
4. Territory	0.66	Substantial agreement
5. Recruitment rituals and symbols	0.70	Substantial agreement
6. Meetings	0.79	Substantial agreement
7. Financial sustainment	0.82	Almost perfect agreement
8. Punishment	0.92	Almost perfect agreement
9. Structure	0.85	Almost perfect agreement
10. Within gang issues	0.64	Substantial agreement
11. Alliances	1.00	Perfect agreement
12. Local and transnational contacts	0.90	Almost perfect agreement

** See Viera and Garrett (2005, 362).*

Finally, it is important to note that "reliability does not guarantee validity" (Krippendorff 2004, 213). The study of criminal groups through this type of data therefore entails also an accurate assessment of potential validity issues. Campana and Varese (2012, 15–18) have suggested three criteria to evaluate wiretap data and ensure their usage for meaningful results. 1) The first criteria refer to the type of communication used by individuals intercepted. The analysis can be performed as long as the actors under surveillance use an encrypted language that can be decrypted by the police, given the fact that is very unlikely that individuals talk freely on the phone about their criminal behavior. Police investigators conduct an external control of the information captured in the conversations to validate them. Similarly, the researcher may also include in-depth interviews with the prosecutorial services and police officers to verify the data collected. 2) The second criteria refer to the assessment of the group coverage, that is, ensuring that key individuals and activities discussed by the criminal group have been intercepted. As with the first criteria, one can cross-check the information collected through wiretap data by examining other sources (e.g. court documents). 3) The third criteria refer to the dimension of the dataset constructed with the information extracted from intercepted conversations. The two scholars have suggested a large sample of conversations, intended as a dataset with several hundreds of observations. The length of the investigation is also important, as it should be of several months, although it is difficult to identify a standard threshold for both the dimension of the dataset and timespan.

The present study does not comprise any particular validity issue related with the abovementioned criteria. Individuals under surveillance talked freely or used encrypted language whose meaning was identified by the police which also employed translators for Spanish intercepted conversations. As for the group coverage, the boundaries of the network depend upon the police investigation, that is, one can only analyze the conversations intercepted by the police. Additional criminal activities may have not been intercepted by investigators. However, most of the selected case studies are police information reports including wiretap records, "probably the first choice for researchers interested in the analysis of criminal networks" (Berlusconi 2013, 78). Wiretap records in fact allow the researcher to analyze a broader subset of intercepted conversations that most likely includes all relevant actors, compared to judicial documents as judgments in which the amount of missing information on intercepted conversations may increase (Berlusconi 2013; Morselli 2009). Lastly, conversations datasets included hundreds of meaningful conversations (with the only exception of Operation *Street Fighter,* see Table 19 in APPENDIX A) and all lasted several months (see Table 3 of section 3.3).

3.5.3 Social network analysis of co-offending events

Over the last few decades, social network analysis (hereinafter SNA) has been increasingly employed in the study of organized criminal groups (for a review, see Calderoni 2014a), but it has been used to investigate gangs and gang behavior only recently (for a review on gangs and SNA, see Sierra-Arévalo and Papachristos 2017). SNA is particularly useful to study gang features, as it is a method to measure relationships among different actors (e.g., individuals, social or criminal groups, companies) (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Analysis of co-offending events, that is, crimes involving two or more accomplices, was not only important to reveal relations among co-offenders but also to shed light on the broader criminal network (McGloin and Nguyen 2013), intended as group of individuals connected by criminal ties (von Lampe 2003). Mapping gang members' co-offending ties permitted to identify central individuals in the co-offending network, intended as individuals who offended more and did so with more co-offenders than other gang members. The investigation of co-offending ties through

SNA therefore allowed to have a more comprehensive picture of gang behavior (Sierra-Arévalo and Papachristos 2015).

SNA first provided a descriptive picture of the evolution of co-offending networks' features (i.e., number of co-offending crimes, average number of offenders per crime incident, and average age of offenders per crime incident) by crime type and across the four timespans identified. Different types of co-offending events were aggregated into five main crime categories, namely: property, violent, murder/attempted murder, drug-related, weapons (see Table 22 in APPENDIX A, subsection "Co-offending dataset"). As for the date of crime, the events were grouped into four timespans that reflect police enforcement reaction to Latin gangs. The year categories are: 2004-2005, 2008-2010, 2011-2013, 2014-2016. The first category includes the first police Operation (*Street Fighters*) against Latin gangs in Milan and corresponds to period during which law enforcement authorities became aware of gangs' presence in the city. The second category refers to a subsequent 3-years period during which there was not much gang activity, though Salvadorian gangs appeared and were involved in several incidents of attempted murder (mostly the MS13). The third and fourth categories refer to the period during which the police conducted most of the investigations and operations to dismantle Latin gangs, whose number and criminal involvement had increased raising also concerns to public safety.[65] Investigation of co-offending events through SNA included not only all relevant gang co-offenders (n = 200) but also 32 additional individuals who co-offended with them, to properly account for each relevant gang members' criminal network.[66]

Subsequently, network measures were computed across the four networks representing the four time spans of gang activity. Relational matrices for each time span were thus created to allow the computation.[67] The type of data contained in the matrices can have two main dimensions: directed or undirected, and valued or binary (Hanneman and Riddle 2005). The first dimension indicates whether the matrix contains information on the direction, that is, who initiates the contact (e.g., in phone calls who calls whom). The

[65] The third time category (2011-2013) includes Operation *Mareros* and *Amor de Rey*; the fourth time category (2014-2016) includes Operation *Trinitario* (which was first conducted in 2013 but whose second investigation was concluded in 2014) and Operation *Barrio 18.*

[66] These 32 individuals are either members belonging to minor gangs (i.e. not directly investigated) or non-gang members offending with relevant gang members (i.e. member of one of the nine major gangs under investigation).

[67] The analysis were computed using the software UCINET 6 (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002)

second dimension indicates whether the matrix contains information on the number of interactions between two nodes (e.g., the number of times two actors offended together) or simply whether the interaction occurred or not (e.g., if two offenders offended together). For the purpose of this study, co-offending networks were computed using undirected and binary data (except for *average weighted degree* centrality).[68]

Two-mode affiliation network matrices were created. Two-mode data is used when the aim is to collect and analyze the relations between two distinct class of entities, in this case actors (i.e. co-offenders) and events (i.e. co-offending events) (Hanneman and Riddle 2005). Two-mode data in the event-by-person rectangular matrix can also be converted into a one-mode data matrix, an adjacency person-by-person square matrix with the occurrence or absence of a tie (i.e. co-offending tie) as the only mode. The creation of two-mode and one-mode matrices allows to draw a sociogram, a graphic visualization of the network with actors and their relations which can help to better understand the criminal ties among individuals.[69] Actors are usually visualized with points (nodes) and relations with lines (edges). The one-mode matrices eventually permitted to calculate different co-offending network measures (Hanneman and Riddle 2005).

Density scores, that is, the degree to which nodes are directly connected to each other, were calculated to evaluate the redundancy of the whole network and of each gang's co-offending network. Density is the ratio of the number ties in the network over the total number of possible ties between all pair of nodes. Thus, density is a measure indicating how well a network or a group is connected, in other words it reveals information on criminal cohesion (Hanneman and Riddle 2005). With regard to co-offending, previous studies found that less redundant networks are also characterized by offending versatility (McGloin and Piquero 2010). *Average degree* and *weighted degree centrality* were also computed. The former is the average of all nodes degree and, like density, is a measure that provides an estimation of how connected the entire network is (Hanneman and Riddle

[68] This choice was motivated by the fact that while valued data carry more information than binary data, they may also lead to misleading results if not used properly, as most of the tools used to compute network measures were developed for binary data (see Ch. 6, Hanneman and Riddle 2005). Furthermore, this research addressed determinants of criminal involvement also through regression models, that made extensive use of information carried by network data not employed in this part of the analysis (see section 3.5.4).

[69] Sociograms were drawn with ORA, a social network analysis and visualization software (Carley 2014).

2005). The latter considers the number of times nodes interact with each other complementing the information obtained from *degree centrality,* which does not take into account the strength of the tie. *Average path length,* that is, the average shortest path between a pair of nodes, was also computed to capture the reachability among all actors in a connected network or subgroups. Finally, *centralization* measures were computed in terms of *degree centrality,* to assess the degree to which the cohesion of the network was centralized around particular nodes responsible for the most direct connections, and in terms of *betweenness centrality,* to assess whether in the network there were prominent nodes positioned on the shortest path between other pairs of nodes. For these reasons, centralization represents a complementary measure of *density* and can inform about hierarchical organizational structures of gangs.

With regard to limitations, the analyses relied on data extracted from police and judicial files, meaning that the inclusion of co-offending events was based on whether such crimes were reported to the police or investigated by law enforcement authorities. The co-offending networks therefore may not capture the whole criminal activity of Latin gangs in Milan. In fact, solo offenses were excluded (though they rarely occurred in the files) and additional crimes may have not been reported. The issues related with underreported crimes may be particularly relevant for the first two time spans (i.e., 2004-2006, 2008-2010), that refer to time periods during which the police was aware of gang presence but concerns over public safety had not arisen so the authorities were not involved in constant surveillance of such groups. Despite these limitations, the systematic extraction of data from the selected case studies, combined with multiple meetings with law enforcement officials, allowed to investigate for the first time large amount of information to highlight features of co-offending networks involving Latin gang members.

3.5.4 Correlation, statistical tests and regression models of gang members involved in co-offending

CORRELATION AND STATISTICAL TESTS

Correlations and statistical tests were computed to summarize the main characteristics of gang members involved in criminal behavior. The analyses took into consideration

seven variables, namely: number of co-offending crimes, total number of co-offenders (i.e., *degree centrality*), average number of co-offenders per crime incident, age at first offense, number of property crimes, number of violent crimes (including murder and attempted murder), and number of weapons and drug-related crimes.[70] Pearson product-moment correlations were then computed to assess the strength and direction of association between each pair of co-offending variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Kruskal-Wallis, the non-parametric alternative to ANOVA, were then computed to highlight whether there were statistically significant differences across groups (i.e., gangs) with regard to the abovementioned co-offending variables. Lastly, Mann-Whitney U test were conducted to assess whether the distribution of two independent samples, one referring to co-offenders with leadership roles and the other to co-offenders with no gang role (i.e. affiliates), were statistically different with regard to the selected co-offending variables.

REGRESSION MODELS

One of the main aims of this research is to investigate the involvement in criminal behavior of Latin gangs appeared in Milan. In addition to the whole network analyses, and correlation and statistical tests, the study investigated criminal involvement at individual level through regression models. The analyses were performed on a subset of 200 co-offenders (of a total of 232 identified co-offenders) belonging to the nine gangs of interest (Table 5).

The investigation employed two types of regression: logistic regression and negative binomial regression. Logistic regression is a statistical method that allows to investigate the relationship between a dichotomous outcome variable (i.e. dependent variable that can only take two possible values) and one or more explanatory variables of interest (i.e. independent variables). This study used socio-demographic and criminogenic variables as explanatory factors of two dichotomous dependent variables: being a gang leader (or having leadership roles) and being involved in murder/attempted murder. The relationship between the number of co-offending crimes committed by each individual

[70] Illegal carrying of weapons and drug selling crimes were aggregated because they occurred less frequently than other type of crimes and combining them allowed to better compare this crime category with the others. The aggregation is also justified by the positive relation between drug dealing and illegal gun carrying (Lizotte et al. 2000).

(i.e. dependent variable) and the socio-demographic and criminogenic explanatory factors was instead assessed with negative binomial regression. This type of analysis is an alternative to Poisson regression—employed when the dependent variable consists of count data, with positive integers, and the distribution of counts follows a Poisson distribution—in cases in which the distribution of the dependent variable shows sign of over-dispersion (i.e. variance greater than the mean).[71] Logistic regression models and negative binomial regression models were run using the bootstrap technique, as it allows to relax the assumption of regression related to the independence of observations.[72] The sections below describe the dependent variables and the independent variables used in the regression models presented in the previous section.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Number of co-offending crimes

The number of co-offending crimes committed by each gang member was included as a count measure in negative binomial regression models aimed at revealing the socio-demographic and criminogenic characteristics (i.e. independent variables) associated with rate of co-offending (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 2.58, *min = 1, max = 17*).

Involvement in murder/attempted murder

Previous research has investigated features of gang organization and gang homicides, occurring both within and between gangs (e.g., see Decker and Curry 2002). This study included individuals' involvement in murder/attempted murder as a dichotomous outcome measure in logistic regression models, coding involvement in at least one murder/attempted murder as 1 (*n* = 107, 53.5%) and non-involvement in such crimes as 0.

[71] Preliminary analysis of the dependent variable of number of co-offending crimes revealed over-dispersion of the data (*mean* = 3.35, *variance* = 6.70), thus possibility of violating one of the assumptions to run Poisson regression. Deviance statistic and Pearson goodness-of-fit statistic were calculated to assess the fit of the model and over-dispersion for all Poisson and negative binomial regression models. Results confirmed that negative binomial was the appropriate analysis (see Table 24 in APPENDIX B).

[72] This study used network data to derive explanatory variables used in the models, hence the assumption of independence of observations may have been violated because of the relational nature of data. Non-parametric bootstrapping method was used to properly estimate the parameters and standard errors for regression models. The technique consists of sampling with replacement from existing data and repeating the process a hundred or thousand times (Efron and Tibshirani 1993). This study employed 1,000 replications for each model. All analyses were conducted using Stata 14.2.

Gang role

The role that individuals held within their gang was included as a dichotomous measure in logistic regression models, with gang leadership roles (i.e. leader, underboss, high-ranking official) coded as 1 (n = 68, 34%) and members with no formal roles (i.e. affiliates) coded as 0.[73] Gang role was included in the analyses as a third dependent variable because of the objective of the research of highlighting gang organizational features. Having a leader, in fact, is perhaps one of the primary indicators of the level of organization of a group.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The regression models employed several independent variables, at the individual and group (i.e. gang) level, though not all models include the same set of variables. Their inclusion was based on the literature, the possibility of coding such variables from the available data, and the explanatory power on the response variable of interest.

Sex

Research has shown that gangs and gang violence is mostly a male phenomenon, though studies have found female gang members to account as up as a third of gang member population (see Panfil and Peterson 2015). With regard to offending, studies have also highlighted that females' involvement in property and violent crimes is higher for those belonging to majority-male gangs compared to females belonging to sex-balanced gangs (2015, 210).[74] As for gang role, leadership is a male predominant attribute, with females usually as auxiliary members in male gangs (Eghigian and Kirby 2006), though some gangs have all-female factions with leadership roles, as the case of leaders of the Latin Kings, known as queens (Brotherton and Barrios 2004). To control for sex in regressions investigating determinants of involvement in co-offending crimes, murder/attempted murder, and gang leadership, this study included a dichotomous measure of co-offenders' gender, with male coded as 1 (n = 191, 95.5%) and female coded as 0.

[73] For the identification and operationalization of gang roles, see section 3.3.2.

[74] Of the nine included gangs, five had at least one female gang co-offender, with the Latin King Chicago having up to four female gang co-offenders.

Ethnicity

Because of the relationship between ethnicity (or race) and violent offending (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003), this study included ethnicity as an independent variable in the analyses. The majority of co-offenders in the sample were either born in South American countries or Central American ones, with only 2% (n = 4) born outside Latin America (e.g. Spain, Italy). Observations related to non-Latin American individuals were excluded from the analyses because of the very few number of cases. The resulting variable therefore considered ethnicity as a dichotomous measure related to individuals' geographic region of birth, with Central American countries coded as 1 (n = 75, 38.3%) and South American ones coded as 0 (n = 121, 61.7%). This variable was only included in analyses modelling involvement in number of co-offending crimes and involvement in murder/attempted murder.[75]

Year of birth

The relationship between age and crime is a consistent finding in criminological research. Longitudinal studies on offending highlighted the bell shape of the age-crime curve, with increasing trend of criminal involvement during adolescence, peak in late teenage years, and subsequent decline beginning from the 20s (see Loeber and Farrington 2014). Similarly, involvement in co-offending is higher for juveniles and tend to decrease from early adulthood, and the age-crime curve of co-offending and solo offending is "invariant across sex, race, and offense type" (Stolzenberg and D'Alessio 2008, 80). Though this is not a longitudinal study and therefore it was not possible to properly track the development of offending during the life course of Latin gang members, a measure of age was included in the analysis to assess its association with offending. To investigate the relation between age and involvement in co-offending and murder/attempted murder, this study included an ordinal variable related to individuals' year of birth (mean *(M)* = 1989, standard deviation (*SD)* = 5.26, *min* = 1975, *max* = 2000).

[75] Latin gangs have relaxed the ethnicity criteria for being part of their gang, also allowing the inclusion of non-Latin individuals (or non-Central American members in the case of the *maras* as the MS13 and Barrio18). However, the majority of the gangs in this study were composed of members of the same ethnicity (or up to 94% of same ethnicity), with the only main exception of the MS13, thus making it of a little interest to include this variable as explanatory factor for gang leadership. Conversely, ethnicity may inform about involvement in co-offending and murder/attempted murder, as gang members responsible for such incidents in Milan were similarly distributed across the two categories of variable ethnicity.

Age at first offense

The variable age at first offense was preferred to year of birth in the models having gang role as the dependent variable as preliminary analyses showed that it was a better explanatory variable of being a gang leader. Given the importance played by criminal involvement for gang members' group identity, age at first offense was deemed more relevant than year of birth, as it carries information on age of onset as recorded by the police (see also McGloin and Piquero 2009).[76] Further, crime commission is often among the criteria for either being admitted or promoted to higher ranks within Latin gangs. For these reasons, age of onset may have an impact on individual's chances of holding gang leadership roles in the future. Age at first offense was included as an ordinal variable (M = 20.72, SD = 4.78, min = 14, max = 37).

Criminal history

Systematic reviews of literature on risk factors for recidivism have found—through meta-analysis techniques—that prior anti-social behavior and criminal history as well as prior arrests are predictors of future criminal involvement (Cottle, Lee, and Heilbrun 2001; Gendreau, Little, and Goggin 1996). Prior anti-social behavior and delinquency are also statistically related with violent and serious offenses (Lipsey and Derzon 1998). Another aspect that may be related with having an offending history is the likelihood of holding a gang leadership role, as prior criminal involvement and criminal skills may constitute an asset for holding high-rank positions in a criminal group. For these reasons, all regression models included a dichotomous measure of co-offenders' criminal history, with prior arrests or prior convictions coded as 1 (n = 59, 29.5%), and prior contact with the police (e.g. mugshot) or non-existing criminal history coded as 0.[77]

[76] The variable may have some limitations, as age at first offense was computed based on available data in Milan, therefore missing possible previous offenses recorded in other files or elsewhere. Multiple meeting with the Police Headquarter of Milan, however, ensured that all relevant criminal data related to Latin gangs were provided.

[77] Since the information on individuals' criminal history was coded by the in-depth reading of judicial files, it may be possible that some individuals who had an actual criminal history were coded as 0 because information about their prior convictions or arrests was not reported in the judicial files analyzed. It was not possible to obtain the criminal history for all other gang co-offenders, apart from those individuals who were clearly identified as having a prior criminal history, because of privacy and data protection regulations. However, the police ensured that all relevant information regarding gang members were already contained in the police operations for which access was granted.

Gang organization index

Research on gang organization and criminal behavior has shown that individuals belonging to more organized gangs, even if the level of organization is low, are more likely to be involved in violent and drug-related crimes, as well as being victimized (Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008). As one of the objectives of this study is to assess gang organizational features and criminal involvement, the regression models aimed at highlighting the determinants of involvement in number of co-offending crimes and murder/attempted murder included a *gang organization index*. The index was computed taking into account indicators of gang organizational and structural features commonly discussed in the literature (Decker 2001; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Decker and Pyrooz 2015; Leverso and Matsueda 2019; Wolf 2012) and items emerged as relevant during the content analysis of wiretapped contacts. This study computed the index including twelve indicators: 1) initiation rites, 2) leader, 3) specific roles (i.e. other leadership roles or high-ranking official roles as: lieutenant, advisor, enforcer, etc.), 4) specific roles for females, 5) regular meetings, 6) rules or codes of conduct, 7) punishment for violation of rules, 8) colors, symbols (e.g. tattoos), signs or specific clothes, 9) control of territory (e.g. with violence or presence of graffiti), 10) presence of subgroups, 11) monetary crimes (i.e. drug sales),[78] 12) payment of weekly dues to the gang.[79] Given the fact that all gangs in the selected case studies showed a high degree of organization (i.e. they all had leaders, rules, punishment for violation of rules, etc.), it was decided to compute a gang organization index to identify different levels of organization of organized gangs. The final measure consists of a continuous variable ranging from 0.33 to 0.83, with the former corresponding to low level of organization and the latter to high level of organization (for a complete description of the computation of the index, see section "Computation of gang organization index" containing Table 25 in APPENDIX B). The index was included as independent variable in regression models

[78] Property crimes were not considered because all gangs were involved in at least one property crime, while drug-related crimes allowed for variation as they were not committed by all gangs. Further, previous research used involvement in drug sales as an indicator of the level of organization of the gang (e.g. Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998).

[79] Two indicators of gang organization, duration and size, were not included because the volatility of such gangs would have biased the precise estimation of such indicators. Nonetheless, the twelve included indicators provide an accurate description of the level of organization of each gang.

were the dependent variable is being involved in number of co-offending crimes, and murder/attempted murder.

Number of co-offending crimes

Criminological literature has highlighted that violent attitudes and risk-taking behavior are positively associated with recruitment into criminal groups, which may also recruit individuals with specific criminal skills and expertise (Savona et al. 2017). Crime commission and "ability to take care of business" may also serve to promote members to higher ranks within the gang (Brotherton and Barrios 2004, 138; see also Wolf 2012). To investigate the relationship between leadership roles (dependent variable) and involvement in co-offending, this study included in the regression models a count measure of number of co-offending crimes (M = 3.35, SD = 2.58, min = 1, max = 17).

Role

One of the important aspects that is related to delinquency and criminal behavior is the concept of status, intended as prestige and respect (Warr 2002). Conflicts between gangs often take place because of the aim of groups to achieve and maintain a high status on the street, but criminal involvement is related with status also at individual level. Gang leaders, in fact, have not only to maintain their status within the gang they belong to, but have also to respond to threats and disrespect that come from rival groups (Short and Strodtbeck 1963; 1965; Warr 2002). Because of the fragile nature of status in street groups and the fact that Latin gangs in Milan did not have an established tradition or history on the territory, it may be possible that gang leaders were involved in criminal behavior against other gangs in the attempt to keep their leadership status. To account for the relation between involvement in co-offending (dependent variable) and gang members' status, this study included an explanatory variable of gang role, coding co-offenders with leadership roles as 1 (n = 68, 34%) and co-offenders with no role (i.e. affiliates) as 0.

Total number of co-offenders

Among the different mechanisms that play a role for involvement in co-offending, the perspective on group influence points out that social rewards and pressure may explain criminal behavior in groups such as gangs (Weerman 2003; see also Warr 2002). A form of social reward for crime commission may be gang members' promotion to a higher status within the group. Because of such group processes, individuals who have a more

extended criminal network, i.e. that have a higher total number of co-offenders, may also have more chances to hold leadership roles. Because of the conflict nature of gangs, however, individuals with large criminal networks may also tend to have higher involvement in violent crimes. To take into account whether and to what extent gang members' criminal network was related to involvement in murder/attempted murder, and having a leadership role, this study included a count measure of *co-offending network size*. For each individual, it was calculated the total number of offenders s/he co-offended with—that is the degree centrality of each node in his egocentric co-offending network—and included as independent variables in the above mentioned models (M = 9.55, SD = 6.08, $min = 1$, max = 27).

Involvement in murder/attempted murder

The role that aggressive and violent behavior play with regard to status is twofold: violence is the result of threats to status and it is used to preserve it; violence may be employed by individuals who seek to achieve higher status (Short and Strodtbeck 1963; 1965; see also Warr 2002). Some of the gangs that appeared in Milan (e.g. the Salvadoran MS13 and Barrio18) showed high levels of involvement in violent crimes. Because of gangs' short existence, violent crimes were the result of frequent between gang fights to establish supremacy in the city. To assess the relation between violent crimes and gang leadership, this study included a dichotomous measure, coding as 1 gang co-offenders who were involved in at least one murder/attempted murder (n = 107, 53.5%) and 0 gang co-offenders not involved in murder/attempted murder.

Illegal carrying of weapons

Compared with non-gang youths, gang members disproportionally engage in violent crimes (Matsuda et al. 2013; Thornberry et al. 2003). Higher likelihood of involvement in violent offending is not only due to gang membership, but also to the extensive use of weapons and firearms by gang members (Carlock and Lizotte 2015; see also Bjerregaard and Lizotte 1995). Because of the "synergistic effect" of gang membership and gun carrying, gang members with access to firearms have higher chances of being involved in violent crimes (Carlock and Lizotte 2015, 179). To investigate the relationship between involvement in violent crimes as murder/attempted murder (dependent variable) and weapons, this study included a dichotomous independent measure related to weapons,

with individuals involved in at least one crime of illegal carrying of weapons coded as 1 (n = 94, 47%), and individuals with no charges for illegal carrying of weapons coded as 0.[80]

Number of crimes against other gangs

Research on organized crime groups has highlighted the social embeddedness of organized crime, intended as the importance that social ties have for individuals' involvement into organized crime (Kleemans and Van de Bunt 1999). Similarly, gangs are not isolated street groups but "are embedded in a network of social relations with other gangs" (Vargas 2014, 146) in a competition over territory and status. To assess the relation between participating in between gang fights and the dependent variables of being involved in murder/attempted murder and holding leadership roles, this study included a standardized measure of the number of crimes against other gangs as explanatory variables (M = 1.46, SD = 1.27, min = 0, max = 6). To assess to what extent involvement in between gang fights is associated with involvement in co-offending crime (dependent variable), this study included a dichotomous measure of number of crimes against other gangs, with gang members who committed at least one crime against rival gangs coded as 1 (n = 147, 73.5%), and members never involved in between gang fights coded as 0.[81]

Involvement in offending with co-offenders with shared kinship or relationship tie

Research on social relations and criminal groups has highlighted the role of kinship and blood ties for involvement into organized crime (Savona et al. 2017), a complex crime and illegal business which depends on cooperation and trust among criminals (e.g., see Campana and Varese 2013; Lampe and Johansen 2004). Similarly, involvement in gangs

[80] In Italy, the illegal carrying of weapons is prosecuted by the art. 4 of the Law 110/75. The variable related to illegal carrying of weapons therefore only considers such crimes and does not include crimes aggravated by the use of weapons, to isolate the effect of weapons carrying (i.e. edged and bladed weapons, and firearms) on involvement in violent crimes.

[81] Number of crimes against other gangs was computed by counting the co-offending crimes aggravated by trivial reasons (a crime aggravating factors included by prosecutors in the charges and that was associated with crimes between two or more rival gangs). Further evidence of the fact that a co-offending crime was a between gang fight emerged from the identity of the victims. When victims were members belonging to different gang/s than the one/s of offenders, the crime was coded as a crime against other gangs. The cross-check between the information reported by prosecutors and the identity of victims permitted to exclude cases in which gang members were charged for having punished (e.g. through violent crimes) their own members for violation of gang rules.

is positively associated with having family members who are part of a gang (Kissner and Pyrooz 2009). Criminal family ties are positively associated with individuals' involvement in criminal groups and also rate of offending (Kakar 2005). To investigate this relation, the present study included a dichotomous measure of gang members' criminal relations with co-offenders with shared kinship, blood, and/or relationship tie (hereinafter referred to as blood tie) as an explanatory variable of involvement in number of co-offending crimes. Gang members who offended at least once with a co-offender with shared blood tie were coded as 1 (n = 22, 11%), while gang members co-offending with offenders with no shared blood tie were coded as 0.[82] The dichotomous measure was also included in regression models aimed at revealing the determinants of being a leader, as offending with individuals with shared blood tie and gang membership may constitute an asset for promotion to higher roles within the group. To properly account this relation, it was created a second variable—sub-dimension of the dummy variable presented above—coding as 1 gang members who offended at least once with a co-offender with shared blood tie and gang membership (n = 19, 9.5%).[83]

Number of crimes with members of other gangs

The level of organization of a gang may be determined by looking at its network of relationships, especially with regard to relations with other gangs, being them street-oriented or prison gangs (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998). While no contacts with gangs in prison were identified (though wiretapped conversations reported contacts between individuals and gang members in prison), the network of co-offending relations allowed the assessment—through the analysis of individuals' ego-network—of whether gang members committed crimes with members of other gangs. For each co-offender, it was computed the number of times s/he committed a crime with at least one co-offender with a different gang membership. Given that committing crimes with members of other

[82] The variable was constructed through the in-depth analysis of judicial files, which allowed to identify whether gang members co-offended with individuals with shared blood, kinship, and/or relationship ties (i.e. being partners). To compute the variable, information on such ties where first extracted for all individuals appeared in the judicial files, then only blood ties of gang members involved in co-offending where considered to be included in the analysis. The initial variable accounted for the number of crimes committed by each co-offender in which it was present at least one co-offender with shared blood tie. The final variable included in the model is a dummy variable, as it emerged as being a better explanatory variable than the count variable.

[83] In fact, 3 individuals committed crime with co-offenders with shared blood tie but who did not belong to the same gang.

gangs may be seen as a criminal skill (intended as the ability of making alliances with members of other street gangs) within the gang, it was decided to include a measure of the proportion of crimes committed with members of other gangs as an explanatory variable of gang leadership (M = 0.20, SD = 0.36, i.e. each individual committed on average 20% of the crimes with members of other gangs).

Table 26 in APPENDIX B summarizes the models by dependent variable and independent variables included in each regression analysis.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The study of the characteristics of Latin gangs in Milan embraced the investigation of different aspects to enhance the criminological knowledge of transnational gangs in new territories. In particular, the research assessed the processes contributing to Latin gang formation (Objective 1), the activities and organizational features of gangs (Objective 2), and the type of criminal behavior gangs were involved in (Objective 3).

The following paragraphs describe the results of qualitative analyses of major themes related with gang formation as emerged from in-depth interviews (4.1.1), as well as gang activities and gang organization emerged through content analysis of intercepted conversations (4.1.2). The results of quantitative analyses then focus on the development of co-offending of Latin gangs, with a specific attention on features of co-offending networks (4.2.1). The subsequent subsections present the results of statistical tests on differences between gangs and gang roles (i.e., leadership roles and affiliates), and the outcome of regression models on gang co-offenders (4.2.2).

4.1 Gang formation and gang organization

4.1.1 Gang formation and gang identity

The interviews conducted with experts, community members, and a former gang member provided insights on the factors associated with Latin gang formation and individuals' involvement into gangs. The analysis of text data (i.e., the transcripts) led to the identification of three major pairs of factors: migration and integration, identity and status, and use of drugs and violence.

MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Over the last two decades, increasing waves of migration from Latin America to Europe brought to Milan thousands of Latino immigrants, juveniles who reunified with their parents who had been legally residing in Italy since the 90s and who had emigrated for economic reasons (Van Gemert and Decker 2008). Such families have been characterized by the initial parents' migration to Europe before the children could reunify with them (Lagomarsino 2006). As a result, young Latinos grew up in broken families

and at their arrival in Milan experienced forms of trauma and difficulties in integrating in the new society, creating favorable conditions for their involvement into street groups composed of individuals of the same ethnicity (Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008). Youngsters who became involved in Latin gangs shared this similar family background, as an interview with a social educator pointed out:

> Families are rather compromised, poorly structured, incapable of profound bonds. In fact, the boys do not have a relationship with the mother or father, whom they have often not seen for many years. Very often children are "abandoned" [living with] grandparents or relatives.[84]

Reunification mostly occurred with the mothers, who had started a new life in the meanwhile. In some instances, this implied that youngsters would join households with the mother's new partner and children. Being raised by grandparents in broken families—characterized also by the lack of the father's presence—is a background that most Latin gang members share (Feixa and Romaní 2014), as a law enforcement expert highlighted. The respondent mentioned that based on his experience he identified two types of gang members: those who have prior history of criminal behavior and violence and those who do not have any criminal history. The social context where Latinos go living initially is unfamiliar to them because of the different country, language, culture, and because of the lack of emotional attachments (see also Van Gemert and Decker 2008). The only exception of the bond with the mother, however, was mentioned by experts as being problematic, as young Latinos would often not recognize the parents' authority. During an interview an expert reported:

> Family reunification takes place after years of distance, therefore [the relationship with the parents] lacks that emotional, authoritative and even normative aspect that is functional personal development especially during adolescence.

Early separation from parents, father absence, and multiple traumas were identified by respondents as factors associated with individuals' desire to seek external support and affection from street groups composed by Latin American peers. One respondent, a social worker with many years of experience with troublesome juveniles and Latino gang members, reported:

[84] Italics between parenthesis mine.

> A common aspect [characterizing] gang members is marginalization, reason why they tend to aggregate into culturally homogeneous groups, although in recent years the aspect related with the same nationality has been more marginal. […] The group often represents the "container" of the expectations and the emotional and care needs that the welcoming family is not able to provide.

One of the interviewees, with more than fifteen years of experience at the Juvenile Court of Milan, mentioned the fact that most Latin American adult immigrants come from the same cities (e.g. Guayaquil and Quito in Ecuador, San Salvador, Tejutla, and Chalatenango in El Salvador). This aspect is not secondary, as it favors the spread of information from adults who managed to reach a new stable life in Italy and therefore serves a positive feedback for families who are still in Latin America. As a result, young Latinos who emigrate to Europe are from the same geographic areas or cities. This aspect may have favored gang joining among individuals experiencing forms of social exclusion and therefore eager to be part of groups with similar traditions and values.

IDENTITY AND STATUS

A second theme that emerged from the interviews is the Latino immigrants' search for identity (or sense of belonging), social status and respect. This aspect emerged from the contribution of various experts and has been often highlighted by gang literature (e.g., see Decker and Curry 2000). As a social worker stressed:

> Mutual recognition of common "traditions" is one of the factors [leading youths] to self-identification. This assumes an almost "filling" function of the gaps that the new status of immigrant inevitably produces.

As a law enforcement pointed out, gangs' social cohesion reflects the common values shared by its members, mostly youths who struggle to integrate in the new social context in which they face several difficulties. Thus, Latino immigrants look for peers with similar characteristics and with whom hanging out in groups, not only because they share the same roots, but also because of the feeling of protection (Carlock and Lizotte 2015; Decker and Curry 2000; Esbensen and Lynskey 2001). Further, the expert argued that protection within groups is usually provided by those immigrants with a criminal history, more prone to violence and protection from groups' external threats. Another expert, a

social educator supervising and implementing alternative to detention measures aimed at juvenile gang members, pointed out the social dynamics of gang joining:

> The search for identity and affective support finds in the gangs the place of recognition and identification. It is not possible to self-identify within the fragmented family context and at that point the gang becomes the family. This allows them to find an identity that is otherwise denied by the social context. […] Sometimes boys have lived in the gang before, but not always. Proximity to gangs occurs through imitation. I get closer to you and I hang out with you because you are more like me. I hang out with you because I am attracted by your lifestyle, I ditch school to go drinking with you. […] Among all types of intervention that we could discuss with them, including the success of the reintegration program, one call from the gang was enough to put at risk even a work of years. We are talking about an attraction, a closeness to the gang and a very strong identification that lasts for years.

The identification with similar others therefore is among the aspects that drove many young Latinos to involvement into gangs, ethnic groups with specific identity elements as a name, colors, symbols, and tattoos (Van Gemert and Decker 2008; see also Cruz 2010). What may have been the initial desire of finding a social group to hang out eventually led to juveniles and young adults to participation in violent acts and criminal offenses, a type of behavior accepted and reinforced by gangs (Thornberry et al. 1993; Weerman et al. 2009).

USE OF DRUGS AND VIOLENCE

Research on gangs has reported the negative effect of gang membership on individuals' deviant activities (e.g., use of drugs and alcohol) and involvement in violence and crime (e.g., see Dong, Gibson, and Krohn 2015). Expert interviews revealed that Latin gang members in Milan were involved in these types of behavior, that not only characterized life in the gang but were also among the factors associated with entrance of new individuals. As a social worker reported:

> Belonging to the "Group" is "codified" through initiation rites (even with the "branding" of the individual with "ad hoc" tattoos), usually [when individuals are] between 10 and 17 years old. For the males, these rituals are typical of "machos", characterized by violent, aggressive acts and with a strong delinquent connotation. For females, at least in some "groups", initiation occurs through the sexual act with the "senior members" of the Gang […] [It is worth to mention also] the substance use, in particular alcohol, that almost assumes

> characteristics related with cultural identification and is very often the "medium" through which the common social values are bypassed, thus allowing very violent and antisocial acts.

Violent and antisocial behavior therefore play a crucial role for many aspects of Latin immigrants' lives within the gang. Violence serves as a recruitment tool, used in initiation rites that mark the formal affiliation of the individual into the gang, but is also a way to confront rival groups on the streets to establish and maintain group status (Van Gemert and Decker 2008). Once in the gang, violence is positively evaluated by the group and is often the preferred way to react to negative feelings as anger. Another social worker in an interview stated that:

> Violence is first and foremost a tool to externalize an inner disorder. Then it becomes the bond with the other ones, because what I do, I do it with you. Third because violence, force, is mistakenly considered an element of important masculinity. […] The gang becomes the place where violence is legitimized, the place where I find myself [dealing with] my instances of anger through aggressive behavior, always through imitation. This happens after that process tied to an affective closeness, I hang out with you because you are similar to me and I no longer feel alone.

Aspects leading to violence and criminal involvement emerged also during the interview with a former gang member, a Latin American immigrant who described how he went from having a job to participate in group offenses. The extract, translated from Spanish into English, provides insights on the individual's path towards group crime:

> I started to work here [in Milan] at the hospital as a service cleaner man. Since I had become familiar with the environment and I was doing a good job, I was shifted to maintenance work. I used to work from 8am to 7pm, sometimes until 10pm or even 3am. I did it with emphasis [fuerza], at the end of the month it was nice. I used to earn a good salary for being 18 years old. […] Those kind of things [i.e., crimes] did not cross my mind; I had started to buy things for me [e.g. clothes] and I had good friends. Then while doing this job I met another Salvadorian and he told me to go drinking, to go drinking. So I went with him. When I arrived, I met someone all tattooed, at the beginning I did not want to say anything, I was there calm. They asked me where I was from, which part of El Salvador, and they were from the same part, [though] I did not know them. The majority was working; they had arrived few years before me. I met them and then after few months we were involved in an issue… soon the police caught us. I did not feel sad, or happy, I did not feel anything. […] I thought I would have had problems for few months, not years. The judgment confirmed my criminal responsibility… I made my mistake.

The three themes emerged from the interviews have highlighted the factors associated with gang formation, gang joining and life in the gang. While the number of respondents is small and each interviewee provided his/her own experience, making it difficult to generalize the results, research findings are nonetheless valuable for the purpose of this study. The results provide preliminary information on social dynamics characterizing the lives of immigrants. Further research including additional informants may validate such findings and contribute to the in-depth understanding of the processes leading youth to join street groups, where violence and criminal behavior are expression of discomfort, inadequacy and seek for status and respect.

4.1.2 Gang activity and gang organization

To assess gang activity and gang organization the present study investigated wiretapped conversations though content analysis, whose results are presented in the following pages.

A total of 1,311 meaningful conversations involving 364 individuals were intercepted between 2005 and 2014, with the two-year period of 2011-2012 accounting for the 74.8% (n = 981) of the whole sample (Table 19 in APPENDIX A).[85] During those two years the police conducted three different operations (*Amor de Rey*, *Mareros,* and *Trinitario*) targeting a total of six Latin gangs. This finding therefore reflects the focus of law enforcement surveillance which followed a wave of gang-related violence in 2011 and resulted—after months of investigations—in the arrest of more than a hundred people suspected to be affiliated with Latin gangs. As for gang activities, a total of 2,183 themes were identified and coded, of which 40.4% (n = 881) emerged in *Amor de Rey*, the case study including the largest number of meaningful conversations (n = 529; 40.4%). Group management activities accounted for 52.8% (n = 1,153) of the overall themes, mostly because this theme comprehends a wide range of activities. Criminal activity and Conflict totaled 22.5% and 18.5%, respectively, while External relations were the type of activities discussed the least by individuals under surveillance (n = 137; 6.3%). Table 7 shows the

[85] The actual years during which the police intercepted the conversations are: 2005, 2011, 2012, and 2014.

absolute numbers and relative frequencies of each theme and subtheme discussed in the intercepted conversations.[86]

Table 7. Gang activities discussed in intercepted conversations (*n* = 2,183)

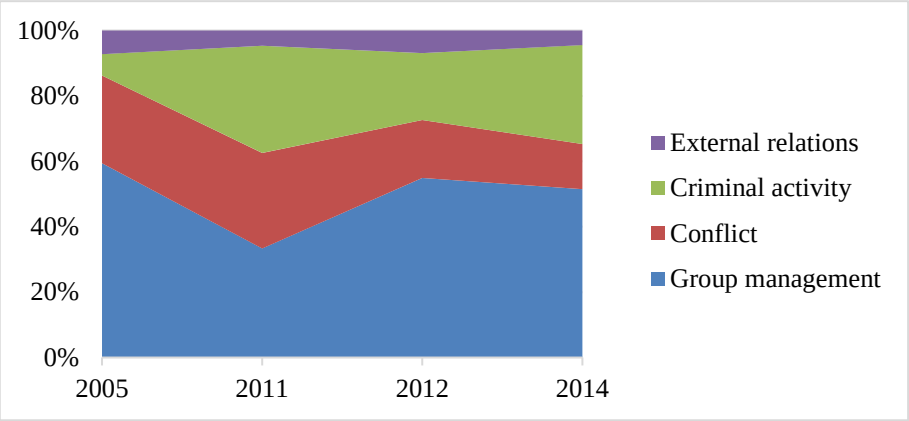
Themes (in bold) and subthemes	n	%
Group management	**1153**	**52.8**
Meetings	336	15.4
Recruitment rituals and symbols	240	11.0
Punishment	203	9.3
Structure	155	7.1
Financial sustainment	147	6.7
Within gang issues	72	3.3
Criminal activity	**490**	**22.5**
Criminal behavior	321	14.7
Weapons	169	7.7
Conflict	**403**	**18.5**
Outside gang confrontations	354	16.2
Territory	49	2.2
External relations	**137**	**6.3**
Local and transnational contacts	108	5.0
Alliances	29	1.3

With regard to gang activity over time, topics related with the management of the group were constantly discussed by Latin gangs, especially during the initial phase in which gangs were trying to establish their presence and predominance on the territory. In fact, in 2005, nearly 60% (*n* = 82) of all conversations included topics related with group management. Conflicts with rival groups and/or conversations referring to police encounters were also among the most occurring and talked aspects, though in the last years of surveillance (2012 and 2014) their proportion decreased in favor of criminal activities. In fact, drug selling activities alone involved an important proportion of conversations among gang members active in 2014 (12.6% of all topics discussed in the same year), the last year recorded. Lastly, external relations were marginal compared with other gang activities. For each year, intercepted conversations about external contacts (with members abroad, members imprisoned, or with members of allied gangs) accounted for approximately 4% to 7% of all topics discussed. Yet, the content analysis revealed

[86] It was decided to present the results at the subtheme level of aggregation, as it was also the level of aggregation for which inter-coder reliability was conducted (see section 3.5.2).

that some gangs had indeed contacts with gang members in other countries, mostly Latin American ones. Figure 2 shows the relative frequency of each theme by year.

Figure 2. Gang activities discussed in intercepted conversations, by year (*n* = 2,183)



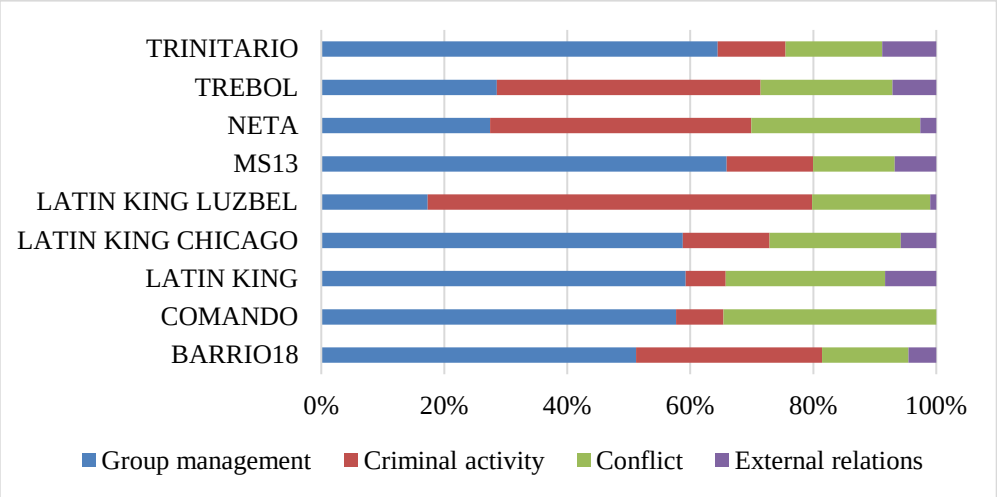
The available wiretapped data do not cover the entire period of gang activity but are only available for four years, hence conclusion about the evolution of gang activities over time should be carefully interpreted. Nonetheless, the case studies provided rich information about gang activities, with results showing that Lain gangs were active in the management and organization of the group, criminally oriented, and with existing though not frequent contacts with members abroad.

Finally, results of types of activity by gang confirm the importance that group management had for Latin groups, though not for all gangs. Figure 3 in fact highlights that the Latin King Luzbel, a local gang composed of mostly juveniles, was involved in criminal activities more than any other type of behavior.[87] Similarly, two other gangs—the local gang Trebol and the transnational gang Neta—discussed more about property crimes (and weapons, with regard to the Neta) than the management of the group. All gangs were involved approximately to the same extent in between gang fights and violent crimes, as well as issues with law enforcement authorities (which were often mentioned, and coded as Conflict). Regarding external relations, however, some transnational gangs (i.e., the Latin King Chicago, the Trinitario, the MS13, and the Barrio18) had multiple contacts with affiliates imprisoned, leaders of members of their gang active in other

[87] The analyses presented in Figure 3 do not include conversations occurred between minor gangs or between members of different gangs, as the purpose was to describe the type of activity discussed within each group (i.e. between members of the same gang).

territories, or with members of allied gangs. For each gang, these contacts accounted to 5% up to 8% of intercepted conversations. The Trebol also had multiple contacts coded as external relations but given its local nature the external contacts that this group had were only with members of allied gangs in Milan.

Figure 3. Gang activity discussed in intercepted conversations, by gang (*n* = 2,062)



The content analysis of intercepted conversations reported in the selected case studies allowed the identification of gang activities which are presented below to provide an extensive description for each subtheme. The qualitative analysis of conversations serves to reveal gang activities and to inform about the level of organization of such groups (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998).

GROUP MANAGEMENT

Recruitment rituals and symbols

One of the most important aspects for newly formed Latin gangs in Milan regarded activities related with the inclusion of new members into the group. All gangs were actively involved in the recruitment of individuals, mostly Latino/as juveniles. Gang joining, however, did not only occur because of the pressure of the gang to enter the group, but was also the result of the free choice of individuals who were seeking to be part of it:

> I know how la *raza* works [he means that he knows every aspect of the gang] …I'm in it because I feel with my heart to be part of it. (Member 1, affiliate)[88]
>
> Milan, June 2014

Once part of the "family", formal rules do not allow to leave the group, as members share everything of the gang life:

> Member 2 (leader): We explained him how everything works, and he replied that he'd been waiting for this for a long time… omitted… we explained him that after this there is no turning back… that after this there is no way out, that he must always go ahead, he must always look carefully at all these things.
>
> Member 3 (underboss): Yes, we did that already, we did all that, and not only with him… then you know that I… we'll never leave him alone in any event. You know that among us, when someone eats, everybody eats [he means that affiliates of the gang share everything…. If anything happens to someone, then the same thing will happen to everyone… we told him that after this there is no turning back, that after this there is no way out, the he must always go ahead [he means that after joining the gang there is no possibility of leaving it], he must always look carefully at all these things.
>
> Milan, May 2014

Another intercepted conversation between gang members highlight the value that the gang has for its members:

> Member 6 (leader): For example, if your family wants to beat you I'll defend you […] I'll tell your family that nobody can hurt you in front of me, because you are an HOMBOY, you have to learn something, that the MARA has more value than your family.
>
> Member 7 (juvenile affiliate): Yes, I know this, always looking ahead.
>
> Member 6: The MS has more value than your family. I don't want you to feel obliged with me only because you are here with me now. If you tell me, I'm not willing to handle all those things, I no longer want to hang out with you… then I'll hunt you if you gave me your word and then you don't have the balls to do those things, I get mad, you understand? I've seen people killing others as well as me, they have deaths [on their shoulders] as well as me and they couldn't handle the pressure.
>
> Milan, December 2012

Detailed explanations and *modi operandi* on how to formally join the gang emerged in the intercepted conversations, in which gang members often mentioned initiation

[88] Original nicknames of gang members have been replaced by Member # (e.g., Member 1) for reasons of confidentiality. In the excerpts, square brackets include additional information reported by the researcher to specify the context or by the police translator to further explicit the content of the reported conversation.

rituals, and knowledge of gang rules and symbols as part of the process. In this regard, initiation almost always took place through the beating of new members. Violence played a key role to mark the transition from the *civil* life to the gang life and for some gangs was associated with symbolic numbers (e.g., 13 and 18 seconds of beating to enter the MS13 and the Barrio 18, respectively).[89] As research on gang has highlighted, violence is not only part of the recruiting process but is embedded in the gang lifestyle (Carlock and Lizotte 2015). Aspiring gang members could also join the group by violent activities and offending (see also Descormiers and Corrado 2016). Criminal acts were in fact positively considered by leaders because they showed the individual's criminal skills and potential value for the gang. Though it was less common, in some instances wiretapped conversations indeed revealed that incidents of violent crimes (e.g., attempted murder of a rival gang member) had occurred as a sort of "mission" that was assigned to an individual in order for him to join the gang (Decker 1996). Criminal skills or willing to commit a crime were nonetheless not enough to be recruited. In fact, to join the gang individuals had to demonstrate that they had knowledge of gang rules. This is demonstrated by the fact the gang members often discussed about the *literature* or *manifesto* (i.e., documents with the set of written rules):[90]

> Member 4 (underboss): Are you ready for tomorrow?
> Member 5 (affiliate): Yes
> Member 4: You know everything already?
> Member 5: I only have two pages left… I learn quickly
> Member 4: Perfect… then tomorrow you'll join
> Member 5: Sure… sure
> …the day after…
> Member 5: Brother, I feel that I'm still not ready, I mean prepared, because I still haven't learnt the rules hehe
> Member 4: Hey! …you must study and swear [do the initiation] today
>
> Milan, October 2012

The importance of knowing gang rules (or code of conduct) was demonstrated also by the fact that some gangs (e.g., the Latin King Chicago) even had specific roles assigned

[89] "Civilian" was a term used by many gang members to refer to members who had expressed will to enter the gang but who were not yet part of it, that is, that had not been formally initiated.

[90] Gang rules included: punishment for being late or non-attendance of meetings, respect your "brothers and sisters", not being drunk or on drugs during meetings, payment of weekly dues to the gang, non-disclosure of information about the gang to others (especially to the police).

to member who oversaw teaching of gang rules to potential new members. In the conversations, the deep knowledge of the rules emerged as being among the most important factor not only to enter the gang, but also to be promoted to higher ranks up until the leadership of the group (on knowledge and gang rules, see Brotherton and Barrios 2004). For transnational gangs, the rules were often known by older members who had received them from members in other countries or who knew themselves the rules because they had already been part of that Latin gang in the past:

> With Member 15, yes, Member 15 is a good one, I believe in his things, because… the guy, is all tattooed, and then he has even been there, to Los Angeles, and… and I mean, when I guy is like that you can tell from his way of talking, he listens to you, he knows several things that you know, he doesn't do things quickly, but he also knows how to listen to people, he doesn't do things on the spot, you understand? (Member 14, advisor of the leader)
>
> Milan, March 2012

Meetings

Meetings were held on a weekly basis and represented one of the most important organizational features shared by all Latin gangs. Meetings usually took place in urban areas that gangs considered as their territory (e.g., parks, metro stations, or streets) and were meant for several purposes (see Figure 16 in ANNEX C). Firstly, during the meetings leaders discussed with all members about the general aspects related to the gang life, including social events and goods that had to be made or bought to reinforce gang symbols and sense of belonging (e.g., necklaces, caps, t-shirts, flags). Intercepted conversations revealed that gang members must have stayed sober during meetings:

> But listen, when it's time to talk [discuss things] in a "PARE" [he refers to the meeting of the gang] nobody can drink, everyone must be conscious, you know it quite well.
> (Member 8, affiliate)
>
> Milan, April 2014

Some gangs, as the Latin King Chicago, also had monthly meetings (called *Suprema* meetings) whose attendance was only allowed to members with high ranks (see also Brotherton and Barrios 2004). In such meetings, the leaders of all chapters (i.e., subgroups) could address issues of their group and ask for advice to other members with leadership roles. Secondly, meetings served to initiate new members, talk about potential newcomers, and promote gang members to higher ranks. Hence, the organization and structure of the gang with roles and tasks was often decided or discussed during these

gatherings. Lastly, meetings were aimed at addressing and/or prepare fights or assaults to rival gangs and included the discussion of criminal activities to sustain the gang, as drug-related crimes. Unjustified absence at meetings led to harsh punishments, regardless of the role individuals had within the gang:

> Tomorrow I want you here at 7am, otherwise I'll find you and beat you. You have two options left". And don't report me to the police, idiot, and I've not drunk… I'm telling you because… motherfucker, you have those two fucking letters on your body [MS letters tattooed] and you still have the courage not to show up at the meetings?!?" (Member 6, leader)
>
> Milan, October 2012

Financial sustainment

Another aspect that intercepted conversations highlighted and that is an indicator of the fact that Latin gangs had a fair level of organization was the payment of weekly dues (or fees) by all members. This form of financial sustainment was so relevant and rooted in gangs' main activities that some gangs had members with the role of Treasurer, who was in charge of collecting the obligatory payment:

> Member 1 (leader): Yes, there will be money to give, those who work must give more money, it's not mandatory for the civilians, but for the "Homboys" it is [gang affiliates].
> Member 9 (treasurer): Really?
> Member 1: It's not a lot, five euros is not that much.
>
> Milan, May 2014

The use of money collected through gang activities (e.g. payment of dues, drug selling) is an indication of the level of organization of a gang (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998). In this regard, gangs used money to buy clothes, necklaces or food and drinks for events, but also as a form of sustainment for members imprisoned and/or to support arrested members in the payment of legal fees:

> Member 6 (leader): Have you been informed of what happened… of Member 11… of Member 12 …of what happened?
> Member 10 (juvenile affiliate): Yes, yes.
> Member 6: Alright, I'll call you later… But you have received the message you already know what happened… So that we change these things…
> Member 10: Mhh… ok, I'll call you.
> Member 6: I'll change the phone so that we can get in contact.
> Member 10: Ah… ok.

> Member 6: Earlier I spoke with our lawyer and therefore we'll help the homboys… On Friday at the latest we have to gather the money.
> Member 10: Ah… ok.
> Member 6: 10 euros… and you have to get as close as you can to the MARA
> Member 10: Ok… ok...
>
> Milan, February 2012

Hence, Latin gangs had a level of organization that would allow the group to collect and re-use the money for members caught by the police, an aspect more typical of organized criminal groups. Lastly, few gangs also reinvested the money in the drug business, though at only street level drug dealing and of small quantities, with the exception of the Latin King Chicago whose leaders had managed to buy large quantities of cocaine.

Punishment

Punishment of members for violation of gang rules was extensively applied by Latin gangs as a form of social control over their members, and to reinforce the code of conduct that individuals had accepted through the entrance into the gang. Punishment was usually imposed with beatings—though in some instances gang members were ordered to pay additional amount of fees—and was essentially motivated by absence at meetings or nonpayment of dues:

> Member 1 (leader): Tell me, what's up?
> Member 2 (underboss): Hey, are you coming to the park?
> Member 1: Nope, I've just finished to get a tattoo and I've just arrived home.
> Member 2: Listen, we are all here already, there is also Member 13. I spoke with him and I told him that on the 18th he will get the punishment.
> Member 1: "So what?"
> Member 2: "He [referring to Member 13] says that there are no problems with that, that it's ok if he has to be punished by the "Barrio". I also told him: "Already in the past we forgave you for a mistake, this time all the Homboys are asking to give you an 18 [he refers to the physical punishment lasting 18 seconds]". He told me that it's ok, he told me to call him another day and he added that if it was decided to punish him it's ok.
>
> Milan, April 2014

It is important to point out that often gang leaders simply threaten affiliates to punish them in case of violation of gang rules. Some conversations also reported the discussion of beatings motivated by individuals' lack of respect, because of the value that respect

and status have for youths in delinquent groups (see also McGloin and Collins 2015; Warr 2002). The harshest punishments for not respecting gang rules consisted of attempted murders and were imposed for leaving the gang without the leaders' consent. In such cases, individual's gang desistance occurred through a process of de-identification of the member with his/her gang, as emerged from intercepted conversation (on leaving the gang, see Carson and Vecchio 2015). Therefore, internal issues in few occasions resulted in violent crimes against (ex)members of the same gang.

Structure

Intercepted conversations revealed that individuals talked freely about the internal hierarchical organization of the gang. Telephone calls, as well as meetings, were the primary mean to discuss about the structure of the group and its subgroups:

> Member 6 (leader): I was telling you about the fact that I spoke with Member 16. That time that Member 16 told me that he would have led us… I asked him why, and he told me that he wanted to make us all "SEVEN ELEVEN" [the name of the clica of Member 16 in the Unites States] …I told him: "No Homboy, I am an ALASKA, and I will remain an ALASKA" [the clica of Member 6 in El Salvador].
>
> Member 15: Yes… Yes.
>
> Member 6: I am an ALASKA and I will remain an ALASKA, and I added that I would have never let anybody give me orders, I asked him: "Why do you want to lead?" I told him that there [in El Salvador] I have my "ranflero" [the leader of the gang], I also told him that If I ended up in jail there [in El Salvador] it's ok to me, because there is where my "ranflero" is… and he replied: "No Homboy, that's not good", and I told him: "You are a soldier as well as me". …omitted…
>
> Milan, April 2014

Gang members who wanted to create their own chapter (or clique) had to prove the leader that they had the capabilities and members to form and lead their own subgroup. Some gangs (e.g., the Latin King Chicago) were highly structured, with many chapters and leadership roles for each chapter. Moreover, the organization of these gangs comprised the so-called *Suprema*, the management body of the gang which supervised all subgroups and was chaired by the leader of the entire gang (Brotherton and Barrios 2004). Other gangs (e.g., MS13) also had subgroups and subdivision of roles and tasks, though to a lesser extent because of their smaller size and in general lower level of internal organization. In the conversations, members would also talk about the downgrade of

members because of their poor management of the group (e.g., internal issues, incapacity of collecting dues). Leadership roles therefore did not convey a permanent high-rank status, as in case of inadequacies leadership could be challenged to promote other members to higher ranks:

> Member 14: We are still discussing about this matter [gang leadership], Homboy I'm not running away from anyone, but I want to hear the opinion of all the people, I can't be the only one who talks, because the "word" will be given by all the people [he refers to the clica of Member 6] ...omitted…
>
> Member 13: You know why I'm mad at him? [Member 6, the leader of the gang] Because I called him and informed him that I want to talk to him, and he replied that he was playing [basketball].
>
> Member 14: Yes Homboy, I know that's not good, because…
>
> Member 13: Imagine if he did something like this in El Salvador?
>
> Member 14: No, I know Hombi, I know, I told him: in my country [in El Salvador] you can't just do like that, I told him that you can't give more importance to a game than to the word of the MARA.
>
> Member 13: The MARA is much more important.
>
> Member 14: I know and in any case things are about to change here, because he's leaving.
>
> Member 13: You will have to choose by drawing?
>
> Member 14: No… Homboy this is not a game… we can't do this with the Mara.
>
> Milan, April 2014

Within gang issues

A minor proportion of conversations included disputes or internal issues among gang members. These problems were usually discussed among affiliates but were also reported to leaders, who had the responsibility of listening to everyone's claim, especially during meetings. Issues were sometimes related with trivial things typical of adolescence (e.g., looking at other girls at a party or being drunk and not being helpful in potentially dangerous situations), but were also due to gang members' complaints about how the gang was being led by members with leadership roles.

CONFLICT

Outside gang confrontations

Conflicts with other gangs and police encounters were among the most discussed topics. All Latin gangs were highly involved in premeditating or taking part in street fights and assaults of rival gang members. Such type of conflict resulted in several incidents of

violent crimes, with 26 recorded murders/attempted murders. Hatred for other groups originated from rivalries in gangs' motherland and for some gangs was particularly accentuated (e.g., MS13 vs. Barrio 18). Police encounters were also frequently discussed, as gangs were aware of their criminal activities and the consequences of their behavior which resulted in arrests and seizure of weapons and in some cases also of documents containing gang rules. In line with previous research on micro-level mechanisms, external conflicts played an important role in group processes leading to offending and violence (McGloin and Collins 2015). Street reputation and conflict with other gangs constituted a central aspect to street groups to the point that gang members were willing to kill or to use extreme acts of violence against rival members:

> Member 21: Member 6, now the Chicaca [members of the Latin King Chicago] are revealing themselves.
>
> Member 6 (leader): About what?
>
> Member 21: The Chicaca are saying that they are the best.
>
> Member 6: Ah.
>
> Member 21: They are mistaking me for someone else… they told me.. ah, you are Member 22, because I have the number 13 tattooed… and I said, so what?!... I pulled out my knife and he apologized and he left that motherfucker.
>
> Member 6: Why haven't you killed him?... why didn't you exterminate him?
>
> Member 21: I was there and the CCTV camera could have recorded me.
>
> Member 6: You should have exterminated him… you should have told him: "your life ends here, because that's what I have decided", you understand?
>
> Milan, April 2014

Territory

Latin gangs were present on the territory and claimed some turfs (see Figure 16 in ANNEX C) which they perceived as being under their control:

> Member 1 (leader): Hey… you must remind the rules of the "Bote" to that crazy boy [with "Bote" he refers to the gang rules that are in place in the neighborhood controlled by the Barrio18] …omitted…
>
> Member 1: Yes, but it's us [he refers to the gang] who control, it's us who decide who will be punished and who won't… you understand me? That's the way things are, it's us who control this area [he means that the places frequented by them are controlled and commanded by the gang]
>
> Dominican guy: Wait… here?

> Member 1: Here, in those places where we hangout, it means that those [places] are the areas that we control, in those places where you see us, it means that is an area that we control… There are two things, either we control, or we get killed…
>
> Milan, February 2014

In line with previous research on criminal group embeddedness (e.g., Vargas 2014), gangs in Milan existed in a larger criminal network of connected groups (socially and criminally) in competition over the control of the territory. Unlike their counterparts in Latin America, even transnational gangs in Milan did not control nor populated entire neighborhoods but were rather trying to establish their supremacy over small parts of the city, as parks. The importance of claiming a territory emerged in numerous conversations in which gang members talked about having assaulted rival gang members or other individuals in their territory. Gang turfs were marked with graffiti reproducing gang symbols and numbers, though this aspect emerged from police inspections of such geographic areas rather than from intercepted conversations.

External relations

Alliances

Gangs established their presence not only through conflicts with rival groups, but also through alliances. Positive relationships between Latin groups were either aimed at fighting rival gangs more efficiently or originated because of mutual need. For instance, two individuals belonging to two different gangs discussed several times the repair of a weapon, for which one of the two had expertise. Alliances were essentially stable over time, as the opposing factions reflected the permanent nature of rivalries between some gangs.

Local and transnational contacts

The analysis of intercepted conversation shed light on the external contacts and relations of Latin gangs. In particular, members of transnational gangs in several occasion called (or mentioned to have spoken with) members or leaders of their gang in other countries (e.g., El Salvador, Ecuador). Transnational contacts were meant to inform gangs in Latin America on recent updates about the group in Milan and to discuss the general situation of Latin street groups in Italy. While these telephone calls confirmed that gangs across the ocean were in contact, no evidence emerged that gangs in Latin America or in the United States were coordinating or controlling the ones in Milan (see also Balmaceda

2007; Wolf 2010). The content of the conversation, however, suggested that the organization and activity of some groups (e.g., the Latin Kings, the Barrio18, the MS13, and the Trinitario) were somehow influenced by such transnational contacts. Transnational contacts were often mentioned as a way to legitimate the role of leadership that some members already had or may have had in the future:

> Member 13: Who's gonna carry the "word"? [he refers to the new leader of the clica]
>
> Member 14: We are still deciding.
>
> Member 13: I want you to carry the "word", if you'll be the one carrying the "word" then we'll support you, me Member 18, and even Member 17… you know that I have contacts with El Salvador.
>
> Member 14: Ok.
>
> Member 13: I called there [in El Salvador], and they are fine with that, because they told me that they have already heard about you.
>
> Milan, March 2012

Contacts with Latin America therefore served to reinforce one's status within the group:

> Member 13: You should know what phone numbers you should answer.
> Member 6 (leader): That's why I'm saying, homey, I know why I don't pick up.
> Member 13: Ah, then you don't pick up my calls because you don't want.
> Member 6: No, because… many things, I have to talk to you, homey, because lots of things are wrong, homey, of which you are talking with the other Homitos.
> Member 13: What? Tell me the rest.
> Member 6: No, it's not like that, and I can't talk on the phone, but many things, that you… how come that I couldn't have "brincar" [initiate new members] that guy? Do you want to speak with the TAVO [the prison, referring to members in prison in El Salvador], homey… and we'll ask about you, we'll ask about me, who can and who cannot initiate new members, homeito? No, you know why homey? Let's speak with the TAVO, because I could have also…
> Member 13: Are you okay, or have you drunk?
> Member 6: No, no, no, I'm good, homey […]
> …omitted…
> Member 13: Member 6, here's the thing, and I'll tell you in person.
> Member 6: Yes, tell me.
> Member 13: The other day I was mad at you.
> …omitted…

> Member 6: You can't talk to me like that, nobody has the right to talk to me like you have just done.
> Member 6: Hey, homey, I know what I have done, I know that I'm contributing to the MARA, I'm in contact with El Salvador and to me… I don't accept anything, homey… that somebody else tells me: "Hey, be careful with that thing…", I know what I'm doing.
> …omitted…
> Member 13: I'm not saying that I want to lead, but that I have observed…
> Member 6: Hey homboy, we can talk with the people over there, we get in touch and we get things clear.
> Member 13: No problem.
>
> Milan, March 2012

Moreover, transnational contacts occurred to inform gang members in the motherland about the needs of the group in Milan. In this regard, individuals who had already been exposed to social contexts permeated by gangs (e.g., in El Salvador) were highly valued by gang members aiming at establishing the gang presence in Italy:

> Member 6 (leader): You will have to call Member 19… we must be only us, Salvadorians… only us… because I want to talk to you… I wanted to call to El Salvador to say that… this crazy guy said that he wants to come [he doesn't specify who]… that's what he said.
>
> Member 20: Does he want to come?
>
> Kamikaze: Yes a guy who lives there [in El Salvador], I want to ask him if he can send us other boys [he refers to other boys to be initiated to the MS13 gang]… we need to talk to him… we also have to pay him… because those guys can get the money for the flight… but once here… [he refers to the money for the flight from El Salvador to Italy]… so that once here we can once and for all set the true MS13 [in Italy]… we can start to bring people from there [El Salvador]… and see how we can organized ourselves… because you know that the more people we bring from there.. the better… and because like this we keep a low profile… and in any case they are always up to do anything [he refers to the fact that the new members would be willing to do more risky things].
>
> Milan, July 2012

With regard to local contacts, a relevant aspect that emerged was the support that gangs provided to members imprisoned in Milan (or other Italian cities), with whom they had frequent contacts through letters or in-person visits. It emerged that for some gangs (e.g., the Latin King Chicago) members behind the bars were still capable of obtaining information about the gang, and eventually to come back in control of the group once out of prison. Finally, other external relations involved contacts and meetings with local and

diplomatic authorities (the Consulate) aimed at diminishing the stigma of Latin gangs as criminal groups in favor of an image of gangs as social groups or associations. This dialogue with authorities, however, ceased after gangs became increasingly involved in offending and violent crimes.

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Criminal behavior

A large number of intercepted conversations involved the discussion of criminal acts, more specifically drug-related crimes and property crimes. The former type of crime was perpetrated mostly by juveniles—because their young age allowed to reach school students while also avoiding police detection or sanctions—and aimed at collecting money for the gang. Drug selling, however, consisted of dealing small quantities in public places (e.g., parks, streets, squares) or at school. The Latin King Chicago was the only exception, as the gang leaders were involved in drug-trafficking and purchasing of large quantities of drugs from Latin America in the attempt to make high profits. During this activity the gang provided armed protection to a narco-trafficker who had imported the drug and needed protection security in Milan, confirming that the Latin King Chicago had a group structure (in terms of roles and tasks) and ability of organizing more complex crimes. A consistent part of gang criminal activities then revolved around property crimes, with multiple thefts and robberies mostly perpetrated against non-Latin strangers outside the gang network. Property crimes were intended to steal goods to be sold to make money for the gang, though such crimes almost never resulted in an actual profit for the gang. Nonetheless, these crimes, and in general intense criminal activity, emerged as a central aspect of gangs' lifestyle. Finally, offending contributed to reinforce Latin groups' identity and gang members' sense of belonging, confirming the suitability of the Eurogang definition adopted by the present study.

Weapons

The use and availability of weapons was one of the peculiar characteristics of Latin gangs. Bladed weapons (e.g., machetes, large knives with wide blade) were often carried in public places, though concealed, or hidden in parts of the city and made available in case of confrontations with rival groups. For the Salvadorian gangs of MS13 and Barrio 18, the machete was the weapon of choice, usually bought by leaders and shared with

other gang members. As tattoos represent symbols of commitment to the gang (Densley 2015, 241; Cruz 2010), machetes have a symbolic meaning related with the power and the propensity to violent behavior. Some gangs also owned a firearm (handgun) or were planning to buy one to "raise themselves", as mentioned in an intercepted conversation. In other words, firearms were often seen as a way to increase the criminal level of the group to acquire further power and control of the territory against rival gangs. Overall, there was no need for an individual member to own a weapon as they were shared and made available for all members of the group (see also Carlock and Lizotte 2015). The extensive use of weapons by Latin gangs was also confirmed by the fact that Italian prosecutors charged most of the individuals as being part of an armed unlawful association to commit a crime (art. 416 of the Italian Criminal Code, fourth subsection).

4.2 The development of co-offending of Latin gangs

4.2.1 Co-offending networks

The analysis of co-offending events relied on information on crimes committed by Latin gang members between 2004 and 2016 and reported in police and judicial documents. Crime data were systematically extracted by in-depth reading of each case study which allowed to construct the co-offending dataset with attributes on co-offending events (Table 4 in section 3.3.2). The overall time-frame comprises 142 recorded co-offending crimes which involved a total of 232 offenders, of whom 86% (n = 200) were gang members of one of the nine major Latin gangs considered in this study (for a visual representation of the co-offending networks, see Figure 17 and Figure 18 in ANNEX C).[91] Overall, crime incidents were perpetrated by offenders who were 21 years old on average. In terms of group size, co-offending groups ranged from 2 to 17 members, with 5.08 offenders on average (SD = 3.58). In particular, 18.3% of co-offending crimes involved two perpetrators, 21.1% three, 26.1% four, 25.4% between five and ten, and 9.2% between twelve and seventeen perpetrators.

[91] The other offenders were either members of minor gangs (i.e. groups not directly investigated) or non-gang members who were involved in crimes with Latin gang members.

To address the development of gang co-offending networks, this study identified four different time spans reflecting law enforcement activity based on gang presence and pressure to dismantle increasing violence related to such groups (see section "Co-offending dataset" in APPENDIX A). It is important to note that while these results serve to inform about the involvement of street gangs in different years, one must interpret the development over time with caution. In fact, police and judicial data, though comprehensive, do not cover all the years in the considered timespan and law enforcement authorities begun to extensively monitor gang members in the most recent years (i.e., since 2011). The analysis of characteristics of co-offending networks were conducted by crime type and time span, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Co-offending networks characteristics by crime type and time span

Crime type	2004-2005	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016	Total
	Number of co-offending crimes				
Property	5	4	31	4	44
Violent	7	8	45	9	69
Weapons & Drugs	1	0	20	8	29
Total	**13**	**12**	**96**	**21**	**142**
	Average number of offenders per crime incident				Total mean
Property	4.2	3	4.1	4	4.15
Violent	4	3.12	4.97	8.44	5.11
Weapons & Drugs	4	0	5.5	9	6.41
Total mean	**4.07**	**3.08**	**4.81**	**8.09**	**5.08**
	Average age of offenders per crime incident				Total mean
Property	17.30	24.29	20.52	23.30	20.75
Violent	19.26	22.80	20.77	21.68	20.97
Weapons & Drugs	21.00	-	20.93	22.68	21.41
Total mean	**18.64**	**23.30**	**20.72**	**22.37**	**20.99**

Results show that the number of co-offending crimes augmented dramatically over the years, reaching a peak during the period 2011-2013 to decline after hundreds of arrests of gang members (Figure 4). Gang-related offenses saw an increase in all types of crime, with violent crimes (including murder/attempted murder) topping 45 events in that two-year period. Property crimes were the second most frequent type of crimes, followed by weapons and drug-related ones. This finding suggests that despite the organizational

structure that Latin gangs had, such groups were embedded in criminal networks predominantly characterized by violence rather than profit-oriented activities.

As for the number of offenders per crime event, analysis of co-offending crimes by crime type highlights that when crime occurred it involved a large number of individuals, with all types of crime having an overall average of more than four offenders per crime event (see Table 8). Investigation of crimes by year reveals that after a decline during the period 2008-2010, the average number of offenders increased for both violent and weapons and drug-related offenses, with the latter crime type having on average 9 offenders in the period 2014-2016 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Number of co-offending crimes by crime type and year (*n* = 142)

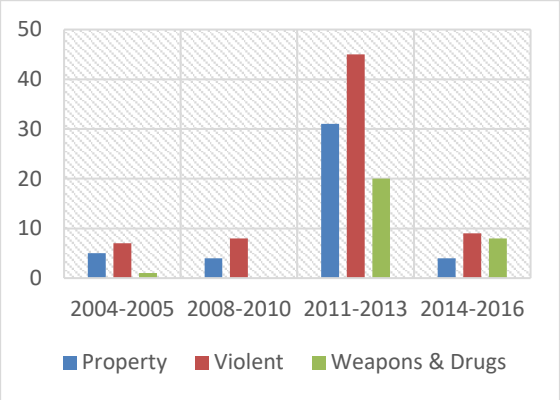
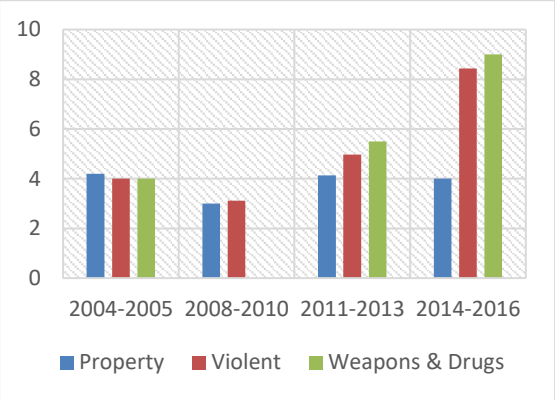


Figure 5. Average number of offenders per crime event by crime type and year (*n* = 142)



This reflects more the fact that gangs become more armed than a major involvement into the drug-business.[92] Lastly, overall offenders per crime event were on average 21 (*SD* = 3.13) years old, indicating that gang members involved in criminal behavior were relatively young. Crime events were perpetrated by young offenders particularly in the early years of Latin gangs in Milan (2004-2005) and especially with regard to property crimes. Property crime offenders were on average 17.3 years old, while violent crimes were committed by gang members who were 19.3 years old on average (see Table 8). Weapons and drug-related crimes were instead offenses comprising on average older individuals, that is, 21 years old. Almost ten years later, over the period 2011-2013, individuals were on average 20-21 years old (across all crime types). Finally, the last time span (2014-2016) saw a further increase in the average age of offenders: 23.3 for property

[92] Disaggregating the crime category for the period 2014-2016 revealed that over a total of 8 offenses, illegal carrying of weapons accounted to 7 and drug-related to only 1.

crimes, 21.6 for violent crimes, and 22.7 for weapons and drug-related crimes (see Table 8).

The investigation of criminal involvement of gangs subsequently included the computation of co-offending network characteristics and measures (Table 9).[93] As previously mentioned, the four time spans represent different years of gang activity as recorded by the police. Off all networks, network 3 (i.e. 2011-2013) is the one that mostly differs from the others, as it includes data of a two-year period in which the police targeted multiple gangs responsible for a total of 96 co-offending crimes. The comparison across networks is therefore problematic. Nonetheless, the analyses shed light on the evolvement gang co-offending networks in Milan through the systematic coding and assessment of information reported in the selected case studies.

Similar to the trend observed for the number of crimes, the number of participants increased dramatically from network 2 to network 3, passing from 21 co-offenders in 2008-2010 to 140 in 2011-2013. Police investigations and operations led to the capture of more than a hundred individuals (including also solo offenders). As a result, network 4 comprises a lower number of offenders and co-offenses (57 and 21 respectively), though the figures are still high compared to the first years of gang activity (i.e. network 1 and network 2). This suggests that while law enforcement actions were effective, there was still an important presence of violent and crime-oriented gang offenders in Milan in the period 2014-2016. As for the of offenders, network 1 shows that when gang criminal activities were first detected by the police, gang offenders were relatively young, being 18.6 years old on average. In the following years, however, gang co-offending networks were composed by older offenders, with individuals being on average between ~21 (network 3) and 23 years old (network 2).

[93] The measures were calculated on binary and undirected matrices (with the only exception of the average weighted degree for which valued matrices were used) and through the use of UCINET software (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002).

Table 9. Co-offending networks' characteristics and measures

	Network 1	Network 2	Network 3	Network 4
Years	2004-2005	2008-2010	2011-2013	2014-2016
N. co-off. crimes	13	12	96	21
Size (n. of co-offenders)	26	21	140	57
N. of gangs	2	4	7	3
Avg. age offenders	18.6	23.3	20.7	22.4
Density	20%	11.4%	7%	18.7%
Avg. degree	5	2.3	9.8	10.5
Avg. weighted degree	8.30	4.57	20.48	25.47
Avg. path length	1.80	1.04	2.93	1.48
Degree cent.	21.6%	9.4%	11.8%	21.4%
Betweenness cent.	15.8%	0.5%	15.7%	4.6%

Network 1 and network 4 have the highest density scores, with 20% and 18.7% existing connections of all possible ties. Network 3 is by far the least dense network, with only 7% of connections, but also the largest one in terms of number of co-offenders. The low density may be explained by the fact that Network 3 includes many different conflicting gangs. This implies that, outside one's own gang, of all possible gang offenders active in Milan during those years, co-offending ties would only occur if individuals of allied gangs were to commit crimes together. Denser networks may therefore be networks with a lower number of gangs with high internal density rather than networks with gang offenders co-offending with many different individuals regardless of their membership. Table 10 shows that indeed some gangs have a high internal density (i.e., within partitions), which ranges from over 40% of connections of all possible ties to over 80%.[94] Interestingly, some gangs as the Netas and the Latin King Luzbel had also a fair external density (i.e., between partitions), with 14.6% of all possible connections representing co-offending ties with members of the other gang. Few gangs, as the Barrio18 and the Comando, never co-offended with other gangs but their internal density is nonetheless only around 45-46% of all possible ties. A further investigation of the network revealed that with regard to the Barrio18, this was due to gang members offending on average with only half of the offenders of the same gang; with regard to the

[94] Density by group was computed on the whole network (i.e. comprising all time spans) and on undirected and binary matrices to find values of within and between partitions (i.e. within gang density and between gang density, that is, the extent to which gang members tend to offend with members of their gang or with members of other gangs).

Comando, the further analysis revealed that the gang was characterized by two separate components (see Figure 19 and Figure 20 in ANNEX C).

Table 10. Internal and external density by group computed on the whole network, in percentage

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. BARRIO18	45.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11.4
2. COMANDO	0	46.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. LATIN KING	0	0	35.0	0	0	0.4	0	0	0	0	0.6
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0	0	0	23.5	0.6	0	0.4	5.9	0	0	5.7
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0	0	0	0.6	53.3	1.4	14.6	3.1	0	0	6.3
6. MS13	0	0	0.4	0	1.4	15.3	0	1.7	6.0	0	0.4
7. NETA	0	0	0	0.4	14.6	0	33.3	0	0	0.8	0.3
8. OTHER	0	0	0	5.9	3.1	1.7	0	15.2	9.0	0	6.7
9. TREBOL	0	0	0	0	0	6.0	0	9.0	85.9	0	0
10. TRINITARIO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.8	0	0	35.0	2.2
11. No gang	11.4	0	0.6	5.7	6.3	0.4	0.3	6.7	0	2.2	7.9

In addition, results on network measures presented in Table 9 show that on average gang members offended with a high number of co-offenders, with the only exception of network 2 in which the average degree is 2.3. Network 3 and network 4, in particular, reveal that over the years the average number of direct contacts (i.e. offenders) increased significantly, scoring 9.8 and 10.5 respectively. With regard to centralization of the network, results show that all networks, and in particular network 2 and network 3 (9.4% and 11.8%, respectively), have a low centralization, indicating that there are limited differences in degree centrality among nodes. Similarly, betweenness centralization is also quite low (in some instances as in network 2 it is extremely low, scoring 0.5%). Network 1 and network 3, however, score much higher on betweennes centralization (15.8% and 15.7%, respectively) compared to the other networks, indicating that there are few prominent gang members connecting parts of the network which would otherwise be isolated.

4.2.2 Gangs and gang co-offenders

CORRELATION AND STATISTICAL TESTS

At individual level, the analysis of gang-related crimes occurred between 2004 and 2016 revealed that on average each actor participated in 3.35 (*SD* = 2.58) crimes.[95] Each actor had an extended co-offending network, having offended on average with a total of 9.55 (*SD* = 6.08) different offenders and on average with 6.29 (*SD* = 4.01) co-offenders per crime incident. This finding indicates a high participation in criminal behavior—with individuals participating in one up to seventeen crimes. In contrast with previous research (see Weerman 2003), when crime occurred it was likely to involve a large number of people—with some individuals having on average up to 16 co-offenders per crime incident. This was the case of a group of seventeen offenders who participated in two street fights which resulted in charges for assault, property crime, attempted murder, and illegal carrying of weapons. Several gangs (i.e. the MS13, Barrio 18, Latin King Chicago, Trebol) were involved in such criminal behavior (including drug-related crimes) comprising a large number of participants, that is, between ten and fourteen offenders.

As for age of onset, gang members were on average nearly 21 years old at the first recorded co-offense (*M* = 20.72, *SD* = 4.78). Latin gang offenders therefore were young adults on average, though juveniles and individuals older than 30 also took part in offending groups. Results show that each gang member was involved on average in 1.68 violent crimes (*SD* = 1.40) (including murder/attempted murder), while involvement in property crimes, and weapons and drug-related crimes was lower on average (*M* = 0.83, *SD* = 1.05; *M* = 0.83, *SD* = 0.94, respectively). The standard deviations of the two aforementioned variables suggest that there was a wide range of variation in the data which may be due to individual level analysis combining offenders of different gangs.[96]

The strength of association between co-offending variables at individual level was tested with Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, whose results are presented in Table 11.

[95] The analyses only included members of major gangs (*n* = 200), excluding individuals with no gang membership or belonging to minor gangs categorized as "other" (i.e. gangs not directly investigated by law enforcement) (*n* = 32).

[96] For this reason, the analysis of criminal involvement was also conducted at group level to provide additional insights on offending behavior by gang.

Table 11. Pearson product-moment correlation matrix among co-offending variables at individual level

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. N. co-off. crimes	3.35	2.58	1						
2. Total n. co-offenders	9.55	6.08	0.61***	1					
3. Avg n. co-offenders	6.29	4.01	0.08	0.66***	1				
4. Age at first offense	20.72	4.78	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	1			
5. Property	0.83	1.05	0.70***	0.23**	-0.12+	-0.02	1		
6. Violent	1.68	1.40	0.87***	0.49***	0.02	-0.01	0.42***	1	
7. Weapons&Drugs	0.83	0.94	0.66***	0.69***	0.33***	-0.03	0.17*	0.43***	1

*Legend: + p < 0.1; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001*

There was a moderate or strong, positive and significant correlation between number of co-offending crimes and the following variables: total number of co-offenders (r = 0.61, p < 0.001), number of property crimes (r = 0.70, p < 0.001), number of violent crimes (r = 0.87, p < 0.001), and number of weapons and drug-related crimes (r = 0.66, p < 0.001). Conversely, there was a weak, negative and significant correlation between the number of property crimes and the average number of co-offenders per crime incident (r = -0.12, p < 0.1). This indicates that as number of property crimes increases, the average number of co-offenders per crime incident tends to decrease (for a visual representation of correlations, see Figure 21 in ANNEX C).

Criminal involvement was also analyzed at group level, taking into account gang membership to highlight whether there were significant differences among Latin gangs with regard to crime-related variables (Table 12). The test that were performed were either analysis of variance (ANOVA) or Kruskal-Wallis test.[97] Kruskal-Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences across gangs for the number of co-offending crimes (p < 0.01) (Figure 6), the total number of co-offenders (p < 0.001) (Figure 7), and the average number of co-offenders per crime incident (p < 0.001) (Figure 8). A post-hoc test using Wilcoxon rank sum test with Benjamini-Hochberg correction showed which gangs actually differ from each other regarding the aforementioned variables (see Table 27 in APPENDIX B; for comparison results with p-value for each pair, see Table 28, Table 29, and Table 30 in APPENDIX B). As for the age at first offense, one-way ANOVA showed statistically significant differences across the mean values of gangs (p

[97] Kruskal-Wallis test is the non-parametric alternative to one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for calculating the difference in mean ranks (or medians) for two or more groups when assumptions to run ANOVA are violated (i.e. normality, homogeneity of variance).

< 0.01). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that on average members of the Barrio 18 at the time of first offense were older than members of the Comando and the Latin King Luzbel (Figure 9) (Table 27, Table 31 in APPENDIX B).

Tests were also run to assess significant differences across gangs in terms of types of crime committed, namely: property crimes, violent crimes, and weapons and drug-related crimes. As for property crimes, one-way ANOVA showed non-significant differences between gangs ($p = 0.142$). Conversely, Kruskal-Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences across gangs for the number of violent crimes ($p < 0.01$), and for weapons and drug-related crimes ($p < 0.001$) (Figure 11). Post-hoc comparison using Wilcoxon rank sum test with Benjamini-Hochberg correction showed which pairs of gangs had actual differences. The median value (1) of violent crimes of the Barrio 18 was significantly lower than the median value (2) of violent crimes of the MS13 and Trebol (Figure 10). The post-hoc test also revealed statistically significant differences between the Trebol and the Comando, with the value of violent crimes of former gang (2) significantly higher than median of violent crimes the latter gang (1) (see Table 27, Table 32, and Table 33 in APPENDIX B).

The research further investigated criminal involvement of individuals by considering the role they held within their gang. The analyses were repeated on all co-offending variables tested for differences across gangs. Mann-Whitney *U* non-parametric test, also known as Wilcoxon rank-sum test, was used to compare affiliates and individuals with leadership roles on crime-related variables (Table 13).[98]

Mann-Whitney *U* test showed that the median number of co-offending crimes committed by affiliates was significantly lower than the median of leaders ($p < 0.05$).[99] The median number of co-offending crimes for affiliates was 2 compared to 3 for leaders

[98] Shapiro-Wilk normality test was run to test all dependent variables of interest (in this research, the co-offending variables: number of co-offending crimes, total number of co-offenders, average number of co-offenders per crime event, age at first offense, number of property crimes, number of violent crimes, and number of weapons and drug-related crimes) for normality assumption and showed that the data did not meet the normality assumption. For this reason, the analyses employed the Mann-Whitney *U* test, the non-parametric equivalent to independent samples t-test. The null hypothesis of the Mann-Whitney *U* is that there are no differences in the medians (or mean ranks in case the distributions are not the same) of the two samples or that observations in one sample tend to be larger than observations in the other sample.

[99] Tests were run both with and without outliers for each variable and the results were stable. This analytical strategy was employed even if the Mann-Whitney U test is robust to outliers (see Fay and Malinovsky 2018). The results reported are therefore based on samples including the outliers, which are also included in boxplots to provide a more comprehensive description of the data.

(Figure 12).[100] Similarly, the test showed significant differences between affiliates and leaders with regard to the total number of co-offenders ($p < 0.1$) and the age at first offense ($p < 0.001$). The median total number of co-offenders was 9 for affiliates compared to 11 for leaders (Figure 13); the median age at first offense for affiliates was 19 compared to 21 for leaders (Figure 14). Finally, the test showed significant differences between affiliates and leaders with regard to the number of violent crimes ($p < 0.1$). The median number of violent crimes for affiliates was 1 compared to 1.5 for leaders (Figure 15). Conversely, the test showed that there was a non-significant difference between affiliates and leaders with regard to the average number of co-offenders per crime incident ($p = 0.466$), involvement in property crimes ($p = 0.339$), and involvement in weapons and drug-related crimes ($p = 0.269$).

[100] Two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to compare the distribution (or the shape) of the two samples for the dependent variables for which the test showed significant differences, i.e. number of co-offending crimes, total number of co-offenders, age at first offense, and number of violent crimes. The results showed that the data supported the null hypothesis that the two sample were drawn from the same distribution (number of co-offending crimes: $D = 0.14973$, $p = 0.267$; total number of co-offenders: $D = 0.16756$, $p = 0.160$; age at first offense: $D = 0.25089$, $p = 0.070$; number of violent crimes: $D = 0.10606$, $p = 0.693$), thus the differences between the two groups can be referred to as differences between the medians.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of crime-related variables for co-offenders by gang (*n* = 200)

Variable	BARRIO 18	COM ANDO	LATIN KING	LATIN KING CHICAGO	LATIN KING LUZBEL	MS13	NETA	TREBOL	TRINI TARIO	Test value	*p*-value
Mean number of co-offending crimes	3.22 (2.32)	1.40 (0.52)	2.56 (1.41)	2.85 (1.78)	3.56 (2.31)	4.16 (3.60)	2.87 (2.10)	4.46 (1.45)	2.75 (1.34)	χ^2 (2) = 22.153 [a]	< 0.01[a]
Mean total number of co-offenders	9.94 (5.96)	4.20 (1.03)	5.63 (2.78)	9.76 (5.22)	12.88 (6.92)	10.68 (6.76)	7.33 (5.18)	15.08 (3.97)	5.81 (5.81)	χ^2 (2) = 41.065 [a]	< 0.001[a]
Mean of average number of co-offenders	6.19 (2.86)	4.20 (1.03)	4.08 (1.85)	5.26 (2.82)	6.41 (2.60)	7.05 (4.36)	4.88 (3.55)	13.67 (4.26)	4.44 (2.60)	χ^2 (2) = 36.374 [a]	< 0.001 [a]
Mean age at first offense	23.89 (5.11)	17.70 (2.54)	19 (2.97)	21.47 (4.16)	18.06 (4.01)	21.65 (5.59)	19.47 (3.14)	19.92 (5.69)	20.06 (2.95)	$F_{(8,191)}$ = 3.235 [b]	< 0.01[b]
Mean number of property crimes	0.83 (0.99)	0.40 (0.52)	1.06 (0.68)	0.79 (0.81)	0.31 (0.48)	1 (1.53)	0.53 (0.64)	1.31 (0.63)	0.69 (0.48)	$F_{(8,191)}$ = 1.553 [b]	= 0.142[b]
Mean number of violent crimes	1 (0.69)	1 (0)	1.25 (1)	1.79 (1.39)	1.56 (1.31)	2.23 (1.85)	1.27 (1.22)	1.85 (0.55)	1.38 (0.81)	χ^2(2) = 20.298 [a]	< 0.01[a]
Mean number of weapons and drug-related crimes	1.39 (1.14)	0 (0)	0.25 (0.45)	0.26 (0.57)	1.69 (1.20)	0.94 (0.97)	1.07 (0.80)	1.31 (0.63)	0.69 (0.48)	χ^2(2) = 57.36 [a]	< 0.001[a]
n	18	10	16	34	16	62	15	13	16	200	

Note: standard deviations in parenthesis. [a]Kruskal-Wallis test. [b]One-way ANOVA.

Table 13. Descriptive statistics of crime-related variables for co-offenders by gang role (*n* = 200)

Variable	Leaders	Affiliates	Mann-Whitney *U*	*p*-value
Median number of co-offending crimes	3 (3.30)	2 (2.06)	3731.5	< 0.05[a]
Median number total number of co-offenders	11 (6.02)	9 (6.08)	3902	< 0.1[a]
Median average number of co-offenders	5 (3.43)	5 (4.27)	4627.5	= 0.466[a]
Median age at first offense	21 (4.90)	19 (4.51)	2963.5	< 0.001[a]
Median number of property crimes	1 (1.37)	1 (0.83)	4014	= 0.339[a]
Median number of violent crimes	1.5 (1.17)	1 (1.15)	3385	< 0.1[a]
Median number of weapons and drug-related	1 (1.06)	1 (0.87)	3963.5	= 0.269[a]
n	68	132	200	

Note: standard deviations in parenthesis. [a]Mann-Whitney U test.

Figure 6. Number of co-offending events each gang has participated in by gang

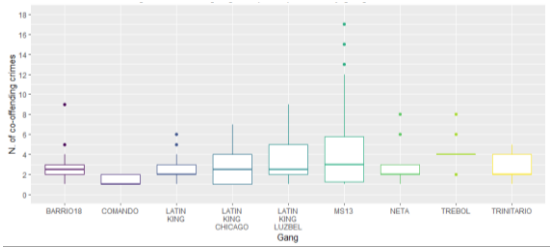


Figure 7. Gang members' total number of co-offenders by gang

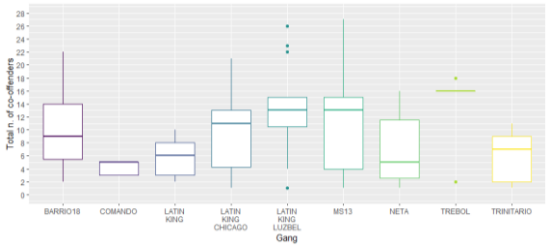


Figure 8. Average number of co-offenders each gang member had per incident by gang

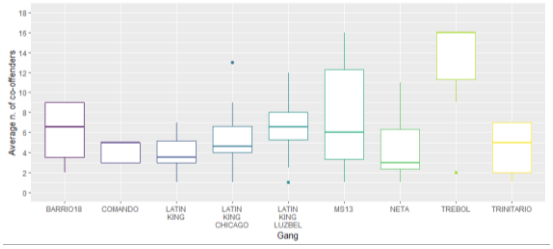


Figure 9. Gang members' age at first offense by gang

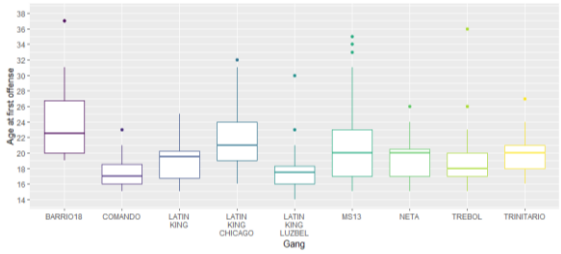


Figure 10. Number of violent crimes each gang member participated in by gang

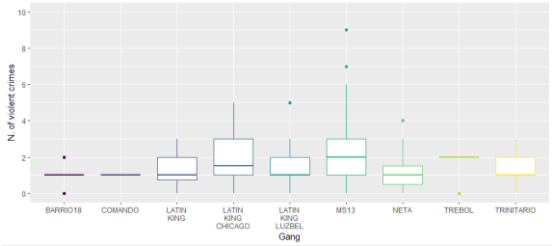


Figure 11. Number of weapons and drug-related crimes each member participated in by gang

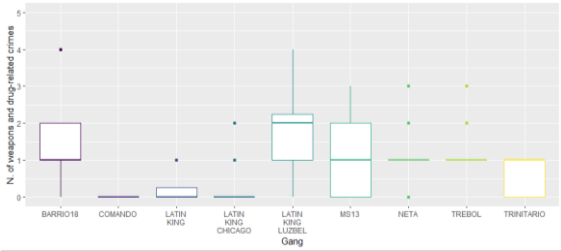


Figure 12. Number of co-offending crimes by gang role

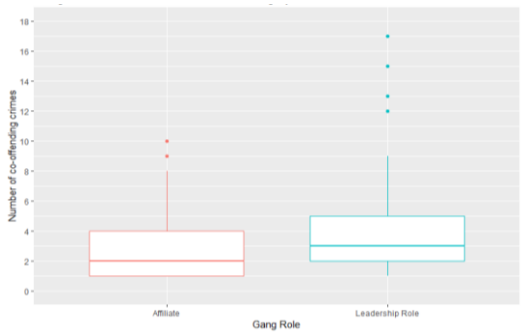


Figure 13. Total number of co-offenders by gang role

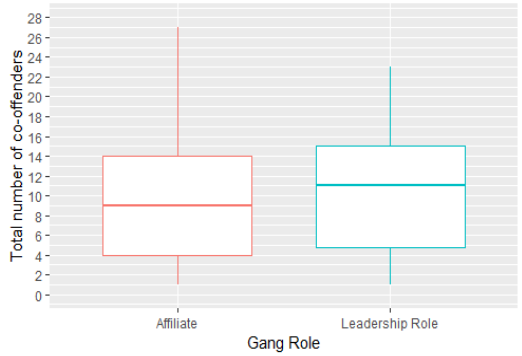


Figure 14. Age at first offense by role

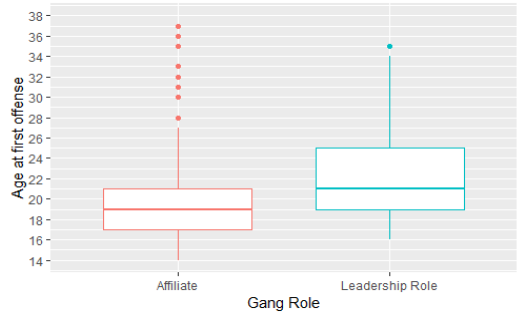
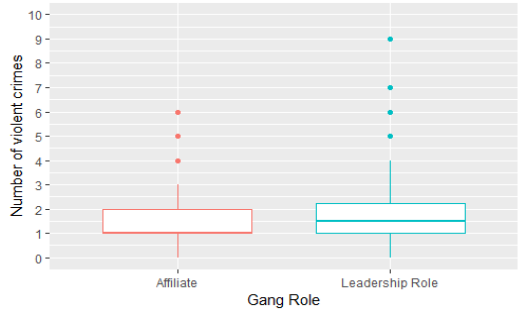


Figure 15. Number of violent crimes by role



REGRESSION MODELS

Regression models were run to identify the socio-demographic and criminogenic characteristics of gang members involved in co-offending crimes and violent crimes. Moreover, regression analysis aimed at highlighting which of the abovementioned characteristics were also associated with gang leadership. In this regard, negative binomial regression models included as the dependent variables the number of co-offending crimes; logistic regression analyzed as dependent variables involvement in murder/attempted murder, and holding gang leadership roles. The following paragraphs presents the results of the regression analyses (for a correlation matrix among variables, see Table 23).

The response variable of the negative binomial regression is a count variable of the number of co-offending crimes, and the models included several independent variables, controlling for *sex* (Table 14). The independent variables of interest comprised individuals' year of birth (as a proxy of age), prior criminal history, level of organization of the gang the individual was affiliated to (gang organization index), the role held within the gang (gang role), and whether the gang co-offender was ever involved in between gang conflicts (crimes against other gangs) or crimes with an offender with shared kinship or relationship ties (crimes with co-offenders with shared blood tie). The first model reveals that for every one-unit increase in year of birth (i.e. the individual is one year younger), holding all other variables constant, the rate of number of co-offending crimes increases by a factor of 1.02. Compared with co-offenders with no prior involvement in offending, co-offenders with criminal history (i.e. arrested or convicted at least once) have a rate 1.45 times greater for number of co-offending crimes committed, holding all other variables constant. Interestingly, for every one-unit increase in gang organization index (i.e. belonging to more organized gangs), holding all other variables constant, the co-offender's rate of co-offending crimes decreases by a factor of 0.56. Model 2 includes gang role as a determinant of offending, and results show that leaders compared to affiliates, holding all other variables constant, have a rate 1.50 greater for co-offending crimes committed. With the inclusion of gang role in the model, the other variables barely diminish their magnitude and retain their statistical significance, with year of birth increasing its significance (from $p < 0.1$ to $p < 0.01$). Finally, Model 3 and 4 address the potential role played by being involved in crimes against rival gangs and sharing kinship

(or relationship) ties with offenders, respectively. Model 3 reveals that participating in crimes against other gangs, compared with offenders who were not involved in between gang feuds, increases the co-offender's rate of co-offending crimes by a factor of 2.16, holding all other variables constant. Model 4 examines the effect of offending with individuals with shared kinship (or relationship) ties on individual's rate of co-offending, and results showed that there was a positive relation, though not statistically significant. The models confirm the robustness of the analysis, as there is no major change in the magnitude of variables by adding new ones, and variables retain their statistical significance (though with some changes). Overall, negative binomial regression highlighted that higher involvement in co-offending was positively associated with younger age, having a criminal background, holding a leadership role, and participating in between gang feuds. Belonging to a more organized gang was the only factor negatively associated with involvement in co-offending. This may be explained by the higher level of social control that more structured and organized group had on individuals and their behavior, as well as the aim of the gang to remain unnoticed by law enforcement authorities.

Table 14. Determinants of involvement in number of co-offending crimes: bootstrapped negative binomial regression (1,000 replications)

	Dependent variable is a count variable for number of co-offending crimes			
Variable	Model 1 **IRR**	Model 2 **IRR**	Model 3 **IRR**	Model 4 **IRR**
Sex	1.109 (0.32)	1.204 (0.32)	0.958 (0.16)	0.969 (0.17)
Ethnicity (1 = Central American; 0 = South American)	1.089 (0.13)	1.098 (0.12)	1.102 (0.11)	1.110 (0.12)
Year of birth	1.023+ (0.01)	1.037** (0.01)	1.029* (0.01)	1.026* (0.01)
Criminal history (1 = arrested/convicted; 0 = none/investigated)	1.458** (0.17)	1.442** (0.17)	1.276* (0.15)	1.243+ (0.14)
Gang organization index	0.569* (0.16)	0.525* (0.14)	0.584* (0.14)	0.601* (0.14)
Role (1 = Leadership role; 0 = Affiliate)		1.508*** (0.17)	1.395** (0.15)	1.345** (0.13)
Crimes against other gangs (1= At least one; 0 = None)			2.169*** (0.19)	2.189*** (0.20)
Crimes with co-offenders with shared blood tie (1 = At least one; 0 = None)				1.296 (0.21)
constant	5.08e-20 (1.21e-18)+	9.32e-32** (2.16e-30)	9.26e-25* (2.02e-23)	1.27e-22* (2.77e-21)
alpha	0.161 (0.10)	0.134 (0.11)	0.083 (0.11)	0.075 (0.19)
LR test of alpha=0: chibar2(01)	28.07***	21.68***	10.46**	8.63**
Observations	196	196	196	196
Wald chi-square	15.353 (df = 5)	26.871 (df = 6)	137.694 (df = 7)	134.519 (df = 8)
Pseudo R-Square	0.023**	0.041***	0.084***	0.089***

*Legend: + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. IRR = Incidence rate ratio. Bootstrapped standard errors in parenthesis. Note: Modality "Other" of variable Ethnicity was excluded because of the low number of observations (n = 4). Such observations were dropped.*

Logistic regression models were run to explore the relation between socio-demographic and criminogenic variables and the response variable of involvement in murder/attempted murder (hereinafter referred to as murder) (Table 15). The models controlled for individuals' gender (sex) and included, as independent variables: the geographic region of birth (as proxy of ethnicity), the year of birth, individual's prior criminal history, the level of organization of the gang they belonged to (gang organization index), the standardized measure of the number of crimes against other gangs, whether they were ever responsible for illegal carrying of weapons, and a measure of offender's co-offending network size (i.e. the total number of offenders each individual used to commit crimes). The first model shows that Central American gang members were more likely to be involved in murder than South American ones, with a 5.15 increase in the odds of the dependent variable, holding all other variables constant. For every one-unit increase in year of birth (i.e. being one year younger), the odds of being involved in murder increase by a factor of 1.13, holding all other variables constant. Lastly, model 1 shows that for every one-unit increase in gang organization index (i.e. belonging to a more organized gang), holding all other variables constant, the odds of being involved in murder decrease, though the magnitude of the effect indicates that this relation is almost absent (i.e. decrease by a factor of 0.002). Model 2 includes the standardized measure of the number of crimes committed against other gangs. Results show that for every one-standard deviation increase in the number of crimes against other gangs, holding all other variables constant, the odds of being involved in a murder increase by a factor of 2.65. The other variables retain their magnitude and statistical significance, with ethnicity increasing its magnitude. In model 3, a new variable was added, and results show that illegal carrying of weapons (versus not being involved in illegal carrying of weapons, as recorded by the police), holding all other variables constant, increase the odds of committing a murder by a factor of 2.63. Finally, model 4 addresses the individual's co-offending network size, that is, the total number of co-offenders used by each individual. Results show that for every additional new offender within one's co-offending network, holding all other variables constant, the odds of being involved in a murder decrease by a factor of 0.93. As for negative binomial regression, logistic regression analysis has proved to be robust to the inclusion of new variables to the model, as the statistical significance (and the magnitude of significant variables) did not change (for model

diagnosis, see Table 37, Table 38, and Table 39 in APPENDIX B). Overall, logistic regression analysis has shown that involvement in murder/attempted murder was positively associated with being born in Central American countries, younger age, involvement in crimes against other gangs, and illegal carrying of weapons. Conversely, belonging to a more organized gang, and having a large co-offending network were negatively associated with involvement in murder.

Table 15. Characteristics of gang offenders involved in murder/attempted murder: bootstrapped logistic regression (1,000 replications)

	Dependent variable is a dummy for involvement in murder/attempted murder			
Variable	Model 1 **OR**	Model 2 **OR**	Model 3 **OR**	Model 4 **OR**
Sex	10.020*** (6.33)	10.580*** (6.10)	9.745*** (5.68)	9.289*** (5.62)
Ethnicity (1 = Central American; 0 = South American)	5.158*** (2.04)	7.595*** (3.17)	6.614*** (2.97)	7.247*** (3.36)
Year of birth	1.130*** (0.04)	1.116** (0.04)	1.095* (0.04)	1.106* (0.04)
Criminal history (1 = arrested/convicted; 0 = none/investigated)	1.577 (0.59)	1.033 (0.47)	0.860 (0.42)	0.777 (0.39)
Gang organization index	0.002*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.003*** (0.00)	0.003*** (0.01)
N crimes against other gangs (stand)		2.656*** (0.54)	2.347*** (0.51)	2.812*** (0.67)
Illegal carrying of weapons (1 = Yes; 0 = No)			2.639* (1.20)	3.849* (2.04)
Co-offending network size				0.933+ (0.04)
constant	1.5e-105*** (1.1e-103)	1.82e-95** (1.37e-93)	8.25e-76* (7.12e-74)	5.15e-82* (4.53e-80)
Observations	196	196	196	196
Wald chi-square	45.907 (df = 5)	54.869 (df = 6)	48.982 (df = 7)	51.056 (df = 8)
Pseudo R-Square	0.214***	0.300***	0.322***	0.334***

*Legend: + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. OR = Odds ratio. Bootstrapped standard errors in parenthesis. Note: Modality "Other" of variable Ethnicity was excluded because of the low number of observations (n = 4). Such observations were dropped.*

The last logistic regression analysis was conducted to reveal the factors associated with co-offenders' likelihood of holding leadership roles (versus being a simple affiliate) (Table 16). The models controlled for co-offenders' gender (sex) and comprised several independent variables, including: the age at first recorded co-offense (age at first offense),

the individual's criminal history, the number of co-offending crimes, the individual's co-offending network size (i.e. the total number of offenders each individual used), whether the individual was ever involved in murder/attempted murder, the standardized measure of the number of crimes against other gangs, co-offending crimes committed with offenders with shared kinship (or relationship) tie who also belonged to the same gang, and the proportion of number of crimes committed with members of allied gangs over total number of crimes. The first model shows that for every additional year at the time of first co-offense, the odds of being a leader increase by a factor of 1.12, holding all other variables constant. Number of co-offending crimes was also positively associated with being a leader, with an increase of the odds of the dependent variable of 1.22 for every additional co-offending crime committed by the gang member. Conversely, being involved in at least one murder/attempted murder (versus not being involved), decreases the odds of holding leadership roles by a factor of 0.50. Model 2 then includes the standardized measure of number of crimes against other gangs and excludes the number of co-offending crimes (because of high correlation with the new variable) and the individual's co-offending network size (because of lack of statistical significance). Model 2 confirms the magnitude and significance of the variables included in model 1, and reveals that for every one-standard deviation increase in the number of crimes against other gangs, the odds of being a leader increase by a factor of 1.70. Model 3 then shows that being involved in co-offending with members with shared gang membership and kinship (or relationship) ties (versus committing crimes with offenders with no shared kinship tie) increases the odds of being a leader by a factor of 2.94, holding all other variables constant. Conversely, model 4 reveals that for every one-unit increase in the proportion of number of crimes with members of allied gangs, the odds of becoming a leader decrease by a factor of 0.28, holding all other variables constant. As for the other regression analyses, adding new variables to the models did not change the magnitude nor the significance of variables, confirming the robustness of the analysis (for model diagnosis, see Table 34, Table 35, and Table 36 in APPENDIX B). Overall, holding a leadership role (versus being an affiliate), was positively associated with being older at the age of first recorded co-offense, being involved in higher number of co-offending crimes, and committing crimes against rival gangs as well as with same gang members with shared kinship or relationship tie. Conversely, being involved in murder/attempted

murder, and offending with members of other gangs, decreases the probability of being a gang leader.

Table 16. Characteristics of co-offenders having gang leadership roles: bootstrapped logistic regression (1,000 replications)

	Dependent variable is a dummy for the gang role (1 = Leadership role; 0 = Affiliate)			
Variable	Model 1 **OR**	Model 2 **OR**	Model 3 **OR**	Model 4 **OR**
Sex	0.360 (0.31)	0.342 (0.30)	0.359 (0.31)	0.283 (0.24)
Age at first offense	1.122** (0.05)	1.132** (0.05)	1.139** (0.05)	1.140** (0.05)
Criminal history (1 = arrested/convicted; 0 = none/investigated)	0.953 (0.39)	0.910 (0.35)	0.843 (0.33)	0.847 (0.34)
N of co-offending crimes	1.228* (0.11)			
Co-offending network size	1.007 (0.04)			
Involved in murder/att. murder (1 = Yes; 0 = No)	0.504+ (0.19)	0.502+ (0.19)	0.472+ (0.18)	0.512+ (0.20)
N crimes against other gangs (stand)		1.704** (0.31)	1.729** (0.33)	1.955*** (0.39)
Crimes with co-offenders with shared blood tie and gang membership (1 = Yes; 0 = No)			2.940+ (1.64)	3.184* (1.86)
Crimes with members of other gangs (%)				0.286* (0.17)
constant	0.082* (0.10)	0.142+ (0.16)	0.112* (0.12)	0.166 (0.18)
Observations	200	200	200	200
Wald chi-square	19.883 (df = 6)	20.118 (df = 5)	22.947 (df = 6)	26.778 (df = 7)
Pseudo R-Square	0.103**	0.098***	0.115***	0.140***

*Legend: + p< 0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. OR = Odds ratio. Bootstrapped standard errors in parenthesis.*

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the investigation of Latin gangs in Milan presented in the previous chapter. In particular, the attention is firstly drawn on the social dynamics associated with Latin gangs' formation outside their context of origin to highlight individuals' involvement into gang in light of previous literature. Secondly, the discussion concentrates on the results of gang activity to shed light on the level of organization of such groups. Thirdly, results of quantitative analyses of gangs' criminal behavior are discussed in terms of type and magnitude of gang violence. In this regard, a thorough discussion of whether Latin gangs in Milan resemble forms of organized criminal groups is also provided. Finally, the discussion includes study limitations, contribution of the present inquiry and implications for future research.

5.1 Gang formation and gang identity

In the last century, the growth and expansion of American and European societies have been characterized by international migration flows. Individuals emigrated seeking for better economic conditions, a factor that still today represents one of the majors motivation for immigration (UNDESA 2016). First-generation immigrants have usually been capable to adapt to the new social environment, while second-generation immigrants, especially vulnerable young people, tend to face more difficulties and experience processes of marginalization which may drive their involvement in gangs (see Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008).

Since the early 2000s, European countries as Spain and Italy have experienced new migration waves from Latin American countries—mostly due to family reunification processes (e.g., see Queirolo Palmas 2009b)—which have contributed to the appearance and rise of Latin groups in Europe, as the case of the Latin Kings in Catalonia (Feixa et al. 2008; Feixa, Porzio, and Recio 2006; Feixa and Romaní 2014). In Italy, and in particular in Genoa and Milan, several Latin street groups have been reported over the last 15 years (Bugli and Conte 2010; Cannarella, Lagomarsino, and Queirolo Palmas 2007; Queirolo Palmas 2009b; Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005). In Milan, the police began to investigate street crimes committed by groups of Latinos in 2004; in 2010, criminal evidence gathered against such groups led the Juvenile Court of Milan to convict

a youth Latin gang as an unlawful association to commit a crime. The judgment also reconstructed and the appearance and early years of Latin gangs in the city (see Moyersoen 2016).

The systematic analysis of police and judicial files has shown that the majority of Latin gangs active in Milan are transnational in nature, that is, are groups with the same name, norms, and traditions of street groups present elsewhere. Transnational gangs emerged in Milan include: the Latin King, which initially appeared as a single entity and subsequently tuned into different factions (Latin King New York and Latin King Chicago, and the local faction of the Latin King Luzbel), the Netas, the Trinitarios, and the Salvadorian gangs of the MS13 and the Barrio18 (or the 18th Street).[101]

As mentioned above, migration processes have contributed to the arrival of Latin American individuals to Europe and specifically to Milan. Among Latino immigrants, some had already been gang members or had lived in areas populated by gangs (e.g., San Salvador). Results of expert interviews have shown that the migration process has contributed to gang formation among new immigrant groups (Van Gemert and Decker 2008). Gangs attract young Latinos who often have weak family ties and are characterized by poor parental monitoring and supervision, creating favorable conditions for gang affiliation (Klein and Maxson 2006; see also O'Brien et al. 2013). Relationships with parents emerged as particularly problematic in most of the interviews with social workers, social educators or community members with experience with young gang members. This finding is in line with previous studies which have highlighted that fragmented families (or "broken homes"), difficult relationships with parents, and/or lack of positive male role models are positively associated with gang affiliation, as opposed to strong family involvement and positive parental relationships which have been found to be protective factors for involvement into gangs (for a systematic review, see Raby and Jones 2016). Further, interviews pointed out that upon their arrival Latino migrants face other

[101] More specifically, the Latin Kings (abbreviation of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation) are present, amongst other geographic regions, in the United States, Central and South America, and Spain. The Netas (abbreviation of *Asociación Ñeta*), are present in Puerto Rico and the United States, and Spain. The Trinitarios have been reported in the Unites States, Dominican Republic, and Spain. The MS13 is active in Central America, and the United States. The Barrio18 is present in Central America, Canada, and the United States. This list of countries does not want to be exhaustive, but it rather aims at pointing out that most of the Latin gangs appeared in Milan are active in several countries. For more information on gangs and criminal groups in Latin American, see also https://www.insightcrime.org/indepth/gangs/.

difficulties, including: low economic conditions (or lower economic status compared to their expectations before departure), strain in adapting to the school environment or job market and in achieving positively valued goals (Agnew 1992), and other major challenges associated with the cultural transition process (e.g., see Vigil 2008).

Overall, in-depth interviews have highlighted that exposure to migration processes, and family and school factors (e.g. low school attachment, education difficulties)—as well as individual factors (e.g. substance use and delinquency) which are discussed later in this section—are associated with formation of gangs and individuals' involvement in transnational Latin gangs (see also Feixa and Romaní 2014). Latino immigrants are affected by economic and socio-cultural marginalization factors and seek support within ethnic street groups as they provide a sense of belonging and social identity (Branch 1999; Van Vugt and Hart 2004; Vigil 1988; 2002; White 2008; Woo et al. 2015).

Gang identity fulfill individuals' desire of social identification, providing members with social status and respect within and outside their group (Leverso and Matsueda 2019; see also Klein and Maxson 2006; Warr 2002). The social support received from the group, in fact, also occurs through what Leverso and Matsueda (2019, 7) define as the "social categorization", intended as a process through which gang members identify themselves as part of a group as opposed to out-groups, and that social identity functions as a "social glue" fostering group loyalty (Van Vugt and Hart 2004). The positive evaluation of one's own group compared to other groups then contributes to enhance a strong self-identification and self-esteem, leading individuals to commitment in gang (criminal) activities (Leverso and Matsueda 2019). In Milan, gang criminal activities comprised gang members' violent and armed actions, especially towards rival groups, in a constant tension to establish and/or retain street status and prestige. Engagement in violence however was not only motivated by rivalries. As experts reported in the interviews, violence also served to release anger feelings and as a recruitment tool, thus permeating different aspects of the gang life (Carlock and Lizotte 2015). Delinquent and criminal behavior of gang members therefore may have been facilitated by the gang but was also a form of selection of new individuals (Thornberry et al. 1993; see also Densley 2018). In fact, as reported by previous research (e.g., Decker 1996), individuals had to prove their criminal skills and/or bear group beatings to formally join the gang. This finding is in line with previous studies which have found anti-social behavior and criminal

propensity, and anti-authority attitudes as being individual-level factors positively associated with gang affiliation (Raby and Jones 2016). Finally, substance use (i.e., alcohol, marijuana and hashish) emerged in the interviews as being particularly related with individuals' involvement into gangs and gang violence. Drug and alcohol use is exacerbated by gang membership (Raby and Jones 2016) and lead young gang members to violence which in turn results to early contact with the criminal justice system (Fleisher 2015; Warr 2002). These findings suggest that crime and delinquency have been important parts of the process of gang joining, an aspect not always central in by previous enquiries on Latin gangs in Italy (e.g., see Queirolo Palmas 2009a).

5.2 Gang activity and gang organization

Gang literature has investigated street groups' activities with the aim to shed light on the relation between gang organization, gang structure, and offending (e.g., see Decker 2001; Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Klein and Maxson 1996; 2006; Pyrooz et al. 2012). In this regard, this study has shown that transnational (and local) Latin gangs appeared in Milan were involved in a wide range of activities, shaping the social processes within the gang as well as the organization of the group. The majority of Latin gangs displayed high level of organization, as they possessed several organizational features identified by other scholars (e.g., Decker 2001; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Leverso and Matsueda 2019). In fact, gangs had leaders and specific high-ranking roles (e.g. treasurer). Moreover, Latin groups enforced gang rules through violent punishments, used initiation rites and met regularly to discuss about gang activities, required members' payment of weekly dues, and identified a turf or urban territory which they considered to control. The finding that Latin groups emerged as organized criminal gangs is not surprising given the nature of the data used. In fact, the analysis relied on over a thousand of wiretapped conversations which provided criminal evidence to lead judicial authorities to charge gangs as unlawful associations to commit a crime. While a certain degree of organization may have been expected using judicial files charging Latin gangs as criminal associations, it is still striking the fact that most of the street groups had an organizational structure with leaders extensively involved in group management activities. Coupled with criminal activity as part of group identity, this finding confirms

the applicability of the *Eurogang* definition (Weerman et al. 2009) to Latin gangs in Milan.

Latin gangs have emerged as instrumental-rational organizations—rather than informal-diffuse groups of loosely connected individuals (see section 1.2)—with leaders dictating the group activities in several aspects. Leadership involved decision-making responsibilities on recruitment, change of the internal structure (through promotion or downgrade of members' status), convocation of meetings, aggression of rival groups, and criminal and profit-oriented activities as drug selling. Despite the organized nature of gangs and the importance of leaders for guiding the group, leadership emerged more as a situational role rather than a permanent status (on MS13, see Wolf 2012; see also Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Leadership therefore was dynamic and volatile (Klein, Maxson, and Miller 1995; see also Morselli 2009), with the group's internal structure also suffering from law enforcement arrests. Nonetheless, gang members kept communicating with leaders imprisoned, providing them with economic support (e.g. for legal fees) and information about the gang on which they still had an influence. Leadership and other gang features—as specific roles, regular meetings, and written rules—not only contributed to the organization the group, but also enforced members' group identity (Leverso and Matsueda 2019). Individuals' attachment to the gang was also influenced by the fact that leaders devoted great attention to the management of the group, also achieved through activities related to its financial sustainment. In this regard, gangs were involved in profit-oriented activities, as the collection of weekly dues from members, organization of social events to collect money, and illicit behavior as drug sales. As previous research has argued, the use of money collected through such activities is an indication of the degree of organization of gangs (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Wolf 2012). Results highlighted that financial sustainment was one of the core aspects associated with the management of the group, with money collected through dues and crimes being used for group rather than individual purposes. With regard to crimes, drug sales generated some profit for Latin gangs, again suggesting an internal organization aimed at generating financial proceeds to be shared among the group. Nonetheless, gangs were not successful in establishing and/or consolidating their presence in the illicit drug market. This suggests Latin gangs in Milan had a sort of *hybrid* nature. On the one hand, such groups were highly organized with roles, internal structure, rules and involvement

in drug-selling; on the other hand, gangs did not emerge as being groups effectively organized around profit-oriented activities. Thus, as previously observed by Decker and Van Winkle (1995), Latin gangs in Milan represented groups providing their members with a sense of belonging and protection and reputation, with "commitments to instrumental concerns […] expressed only with regard to pursuits of more immediate gratification" (1995, 602). Moreover, gangs' street nature and extensive involvement in violent crimes made them highly visible and vulnerable to law enforcement interventions. Violent crimes were essentially the result of between gang feuds whose roots trace back to gang conflict in members' motherland, as the case of the Salvadorian MS13 and Barrio18.

The hybrid nature also emerges when assessing Latin gangs in terms of maturity levels, as conceptualized by Gottschalk (2016). In fact, most of the gangs at the time of law enforcement surveillance displayed signs typical of the *consolidation* stage, as groups had a formal hierarchy with leadership roles, formal rules and punishment for their violations, and systems of criteria to evaluate gang members (Gottschalk 2016, 1273). However, gang illicit and/or profitable activities were not perpetrated in organized networks and gangs were still extensively involved in activities characterizing maturity level 2 of *territorialization.* In fact, even organized Latin groups were highly involved in claiming specific turfs through violent and risky criminal activities.

Another indicator of gang organization regarded Latin groups' external relations (Decker 2001). As results from content analysis have shown, in many instances the police intercepted transnational contacts between gang members in Milan and gang members in Latin America or other countries (e.g., Sweden, Spain). These transnational external relations emerged as informal communications to update gang members elsewhere about the development of the gang in Milan. In some instances, members of the Trinitarios and the MS13 spoke with gang leaders abroad about the necessity of receiving new members from Latin America to enhance their power over rival groups. In other occasions, the leader of the Barrio18—who was already a gang member before migrating to Italy—spoke freely with gang members in El Salvador. As gang leaders reported in wiretapped conversations, the contacts occurred with members imprisoned in El Salvador rather than with gang members on the streets. The conversations regarded a variety of topics, among all the constant rivalry with the MS13 and the alleged capability of gang leaders in Milan

of solving issues that other compatriots in Milan had in El Salvador. Such contacts highlight that gang members in Milan were aware to be part of larger criminal organizations to the extent that gang members could move to other territories where their gang was present—as reported by a MS13 leader in one conversation. In some occasions, members of the MS13 and the Trinitario even claimed to have sent money to the gang in their motherland, El Salvador and Dominican Republic respectively, to sustain members' legal expenses. Despite these transnational contacts, the analysis of wiretapped conversations did not find evidence that there was an actual coordination and/or control of the groups in Milan by the groups in Latin America. In line with previous research, this suggests that there has not been a collective gang migration (Maxson 1998; Wolf 2012), but rather the migration of individuals. The subsequent emergence of gangs therefore has been the result of a "cultural transmission of gang symbols, including names, clothing, language, posturing, reputation, and affectations" (Van Gemert and Decker 2008, 21; see also Balmaceda 2007; Bruneau, Dammert, and Skinner 2011). Gang glocalization (Feixa and Romaní 2014; Van Hellemont and Densley 2019) appears to play a role also in the context of Latin gangs in Milan: street groups were influenced by the global gang culture to the extent that members embraced the same styles and symbols found elsewhere. Examples of these processes have emerged especially from wiretapped conversations. Latin gang members identified themselves with pre-existing codes of conducts (or rules), colors, and even songs shared on social media channels (as Facebook or YouTube). Individuals have benefited from the global gang culture without being passive actors; in some occasions they have mentioned, for instance, their desire to compose a song to contribute to what has emerged as being a transnational gang brand (more than a transnational criminal organization). Wearing the same clothes, carrying the same symbolic weapons (e.g., the machete), using the same gang signs, and getting gang-related tattoos immediately places Latino juveniles and young adults within a broader context not bounded only to the local territory in which they live. For these reasons, addressing how global gang identity influences and impact local groups emerge as being essential to fully understand social and deviant street group dynamics, as "gangs fulfil desires and answer to emotional needs that go beyond a sense of belonging" (Van Hellemont and Densley 2019, 185).

Finally, it is important to discuss gang activity and gang organization in light of the Maxson-Klein (1996; 2006) five gang typologies (see Table 1 in section 1.2). Transnational Latin gangs resembles what the authors called the *neotraditional gang*. Through the maturity levels framework, Gottschalk (2016, 1273) has argued that street gangs at maturity level 3 of consolidation may be interpreted as traditional street gangs. However, given the hybrid nature of Latin gangs in Milan previously discussed, they are better interpreted as neotraditional gangs. In fact, based on the analysis of judicial documents, most of the Latin gangs were organized into one or more subgroups. The Latin King Chicago and the MS13 emerged as the most structured groups—with 5 and 3 different cliques, respectively—while the Barrio18 was the only transnational gang without evidence of subgroups. These groups have been in existence for less than 10 years and they are small in size (i.e., less than 50 members)—in this resembling more the *compressed gang*—with the exception of the MS13 and the Latin King Chicago which counted more than 50 members.[102] The age range is medium-wide, with a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 23 years between the oldest and the youngest member. The Salvadorian MS13 and Barrio18 were among the gangs with the largest age range, 23 years 18 years respectively. Territoriality is another aspect related with gangs, as parks or other public spaces were often mentioned and/or claimed as their turf also through the extensive use of graffiti. Finally, all gangs displayed crime versatility, as they were involved in different types of crimes, including property crimes, violent and serious crimes, drug-related crimes and illegal carrying of weapons.

5.3 Gang criminal involvement

A consistent finding in criminological research is the strong relationship between gang membership and offending (Pyrooz et al. 2016). Gang members engage in violent behavior for a variety of reasons, including spatial proximity to other groups and feuds over turfs/territories, through group processes promoting or reinforcing violence (see Carlock and Lizotte 2015). In Milan, between 2004 and 2016, the appearance and

[102] Gang members were not only counted among co-offenders, but also through the content analysis in which individuals reported as being gang members, though no criminal evidence was gathered against them. The information about the approximate number of members was cross-checked through meetings with law enforcement officials which confirmed the large size of some groups.

presence of multiple Latin gangs resulted in extensive violence on the street, with often large offending and opposing groups responsible for different types of crime.

The codification and analysis of co-offending crimes involving Latin groups permitted to highlight, through a visual representation of such events, that several apparently separated offenses were in fact part of larger co-offending networks (see Figure 17 and Figure 18 in ANNEX C), with violent events interconnected (see also Pyrooz, Moule, and Decker 2014). In contrast with previous studies that have reported higher proportion of crime dyads or triads over larger offending groups (Carrington 2002; Carrington et al. 2013; McGloin et al. 2008; Reiss and Farrington 1991; Suzuki et al. 1994), gang related co-offenses had an average of 5.08 (SD = 3.58) offenders per event. In fact, when gang members offended, they did so in large groups: 18.3% of offenses were pair crimes and 21.1% were triads, but a greater percentage of crimes comprised four perpetrators (26.1%) or five or more offenders (34.5%). A multitude of factors are associated with gang co-offending events comprising such a large number of offenders. First, the participation of gang leaders in criminal events and the presence of gang members of allied gangs were positively associated with the number of offenders per crime event. In fact, there was a moderate, positive and significant correlation between the number of offenders and the number of leaders per crime event (r = 0.45, $p < 0.001$), and between the number of offenders and the number of gangs involved in that crime event (r = 0.47, $p < 0.001$).[103] This indicates that as the participation of members with leadership roles increases, the overall number of offenders per crime event also increases. Further, as the number of gangs involved increases, the number of offenders also increases. The association between the number of gangs and the number of offenders however must be interpreted with caution, as it is influenced by the fact that the crimes comprising most gangs (i.e. three) were also the crimes comprising the greatest number of offenders (i.e. seventeen).[104] Secondly, analysis by crime type revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the average number of offenders per crime event across crime types (ANOVA test, $F_{(2,89)} = 3.592$, $p < 0.05$). Post-hoc comparisons using the

[103] Non-significant correlation (i.e., $p > 0.05$) was found between the number of offenders per crime event and: the fact that the event was a between gang crime (dummy variable), the mean age of onset of offenders, and the number of victims.

[104] In fact, if the correlation is computed removing those four observations and including only crimes involving one or two gangs, the association between the number of gangs involved and number of offenders per crime event becomes weak (r = 0.16, $p < 0.1$).

Tukey HSD test then showed that weapons and drug-related crimes had on average more offenders per crime event (6.41 offenders) than property crimes (4.15 offenders). This indicates that large offending groups mostly occurred in relation with drug selling activities and illegal carrying of weapons (see Table 8). Overall, gangs engaged in a wide range of offenses (Klein 1995), with the proportion of violent offenses higher than other types of crime (i.e., property, weapons/drug-related). In fact, 48.5% of the total crimes were violent, including assaults, criminal injury and murder/attempted murder. Nonetheless, when observing the average number of offenders per crime event, the crime type that emerged with the largest figure is weapons/drug-related, with an average of 6.41 offenders, whereas violent and property crimes accounted for 5.11 and 4.15 offenders on average, respectively. This finding confirms the association between group size and violent crimes previously observed (McGloin and Piquero 2009), but also points out the armed nature of these gangs (see Carlock and Lizotte 2015).

The analysis of gangs' criminal involvement over time highlights the several incidents of offending behavior that occurred in most recent years, which have been characterized also by a high average number of offenders per crime event and a high average number of offenders each gang member used for committing crimes.[105] In the most recent years considered (i.e., 2014-2016), such statistics show that crimes involved an average of 8 gang offenders who had on average a large criminal network of roughly 10 accomplices. A connection between group size and violence has emerged. Between 2011 and 2016, violent crimes—and illegal carrying of weapons—were the type of offenses comprising the largest number of perpetrators, topping an average of 8-9 offenders per crime event over the period 2014-2016 (see Table 8). This finding is line with previous studies that found that the average number of offenders per crime event is higher for violent crimes compared to other offenses (McGloin and Piquero 2009). In discussing the relation between group offending and violence, McGloin and Piquero (2009) argued that violent behavior is influenced by the mere presence of accomplices, as it diffuses the responsibility among actors and increases the feeling of anonymity, especially as group size increases (see also Lantz 2018; Mcgloin and Rowan 2015; Mcgloin and Thomas

[105] While these findings inform about the criminal behavior of gangs in different years, results on the development over time must be interpreted with caution, as the data may not fully capture the changes in criminal behavior throughout the years. In other words, it may be difficult to assess the actual development over time because only in recent years police begun to extensively monitor Latin gangs.

2016). Further, other studies on co-offending and violent crimes found support for the learning mechanism of violence (Conway and McCord 2002), also observed in research on peer influence and group delinquency (Akers 2009; Anderson 1999; Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Warr 2002).

The extensive criminal involvement of Latin groups may also be interpreted with the reciprocal relation between group cohesion and conflict. Rivalries between newly formed groups and other external conflicts (e.g. between the gang and police) contributed to enhance individuals' attachment to the gang and strengthened within gang ties (Sierra-Arévalo and Papachristos 2015). Between gang conflicts essentially took the form of two opposing groups, as co-offending events involving more than two gangs were less common (only 2.8% of crimes). In fact, only a small percentage of all possible co-offending ties regarded individuals of two different gangs offending together against another gang (see Table 10). In general, the investigation of offending by gang did not reveal clear patterns. Nevertheless, some differences across gangs have been found. For instance, the Salvadorian Barrio18 clearly emerged as the group whose members were on average older than members of other gangs at the time of first offense, being almost 24 years old (see Table 12). Further, members of the MS13 emerged as the most violent offenders and among the most prolific, as each member was involved on average in at least two violent crimes (including murder/attempted murder) and on average in more than four offenses. However, the local gangs of the Trebol and Latin Ling Luzbel were the groups whose members had the largest criminal network, having on average between 12 and 15 accomplices.

At individual level, statistical tests comparing the offending median values of leaders and affiliates showed that individuals with leadership roles were more involved in co-offending, violent crimes, had a larger criminal network of offenders, and were older at the time of first offense, with the median age of 21 (see Table 13). Therefore, holding gang leadership roles was not associated with lower involvement in co-offending but rather the opposite, thus exposing even individuals with high status to the risk of being caught by the police. This finding was also confirmed by negative binomial regression models which showed that, keeping other variables constant, having a prior history of offending, being involved in conflict against other gangs (i.e. committing at least one crime against a rival group), and being a leader, was associated with higher rate of

involvement in co-offending. In line with the argument made by Short and Strodtbeck (1963; 1965), the higher criminal involvement of leaders may be explained by the fact leaders promoted and participated in offending against rival groups in the attempt to maintain the control over their group and reinforce their status exposed to in-group and out-group threats (see also Warr 2002).

As for the relation between gang organization and offending, negative binomial regression models showed that belonging to more organized gang was negatively associated with individuals' rate of co-offending crimes (see Table 14). This finding is in contrast which previous work reporting a positive association between belonging to a structured gang and being involved in violent offending, drug selling, and gun carrying (Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Sheley et al. 1995). Finally, consistent with previous research pointing out the higher likelihood of co-offending among young offenders (e.g., McCord and Conway 2005; Reiss 1988; Reiss and Farrington 1991), the analyses revealed that young age of gang members' was positively associated with greater rate of co-offending.[106] The positive relation between young age and offending also emerged from logistic regression assessing the characteristics of gang members' involved in serious crimes as murder/attempted murder, consistent with research on early age onset of co-offending and serious and violent criminal career (Conway and McCord 2002; 2002; see also Zimring 1981; see also Lantz 2019). This finding may be explained by the fact that young gang members engaged in violent acts to prove others that they were *machos* (i.e. tough men), an essential feature for gaining respect, maintain status within the group, and reduce the risk of ridicule (Anderson 1999; Benenson 1990; Bottcher 2001; Short 1969; Short and Strodtbeck 1965). With regard to ethnicity, findings from logistic regression models showed that, holding other variables constant, Central American gang members (compared to Southern Americans) were more likely to commit murder/attempted murder. Involvement in murder was also positively associated with gang members' participation in between gang feuds and illegal carrying of weapons (see Table 15). Conversely, for every unit increase in the gang member's co-offending network size, that is, for every additional accomplice in his/her criminal network, the

[106] It is however important to note that more recent large-scale studies on co-offending, conducted by Carrington (2002) in Canada and by Stolzenberg and D'Alessio (2008) in the United States, have contradicted the consistent finding of previous small-scale investigations that prevalence of co-offending (over solo-offending) is substantial among young offenders.

probability of individual's involvement in murder decreased. Research has reported that individuals' involvement in violent offending is positively associated with large offending groups, as they provide greater chance of coming to contact with violent or serious offenders (McGloin and Piquero 2009, 338). However, in case of serious offenses as murder/attempted murder, individuals with large criminal networks may also be at higher risk of being detected by the police because of the risky nature of the crime and the challenge of ensuring trust in criminal cooperation with many individuals. In fact, while violent offending is an example of *hostage-taking* reducing the risk of defection as individuals have incriminating information about each other (Campana and Varese 2013; Gambetta 2009), in large criminal networks individuals may nonetheless be exposed to the risk of being denounced by an accomplice (Morselli 2009). This possibly explains the negative relation between the size of offenders' criminal network and involvement in murder/attempted murder.

Lastly, logistic regressions modeling the probability of being a gang leader revealed that being older at the age at first offense was positively associated with holding leadership roles. Individuals with greater involvement in co-offending were also more likely to become leaders, though the relation between leadership and offending resulted as being negative with regard to serious violent crimes as murder. This is in contrast with results comparing median values of violent crimes of leaders and affiliates (Table 13); leaders are more involved in violent crimes than affiliates, but if violence is considered only in terms of murder, then committing such offense decreases the individual's likelihood of holding leadership roles.[107] This suggests that holding leadership roles is associated with avoidance of extreme acts of violence, an essential aspect to reduce exposure to law enforcement surveillance. In addition, participating in crimes against rival gangs, and offending with gang members with shared kinship ties, increases the odds of being a gang leader. Since the gang represents a family for its members, it is no surprise that sharing kinship ties with affiliates increases the chances of being a leader of the group, as this additional type of tie enhances and reinforces cooperation and trust among members, and makes it more difficult for affiliates to betray other affiliates (Densley 2015; see also Campana and Varese 2013; Gambetta 2009; Felson 2009). Finally,

[107] Further descriptive analyses seem to support this finding: of the total number of individuals involved in murder (n = 109), only 24.4% (n = 31) were gang leaders; more than half of the leaders (n = 37, 54.4%) therefore was never involved in murder.

findings have shown that offending with members of other gangs decreased the likelihood of holding leadership roles within the gang. Relationship with other groups (in prison or on the street) has been reported as an indicator of gang organization to the extent that it may reveal the evolution of gangs towards forms of more organized groups (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998). In the case of Latin gangs, the negative relation between offending with other groups and holding a leadership role within the gang may be explained by the fact that in newly formed groups such criminal ties could be considered as a potential risk of revealing gang information to other street gangs. In fact, while alliances were present among Latin gangs in Milan, overall such groups were all in competition against each other for establishing their presence on the territory.

5.4 Gang organization and criminal behavior: gangs and organized crime

Over the last few decades, scholars have debated over the nature of gangs in terms of organizational, structural, and behavioral features. Some scholars have highlighted that gangs are disorganized groups with an informal-diffuse structure composed of individuals motivated by self-interest (Decker and Curry 2000, 474); others have discussed in favor of the so-called instrumental-rational view that considers gangs as being organized in a vertical structure with leadership roles, meetings and rules, and ability to operate towards group rather than individual goals (e.g., Decker and Curry 2000; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991). Overall, a very limited number of studies has found evidence supporting the organized nature of gangs, and even in such cases the research findings may have been due to a specific attention of researchers to some groups (Decker and Pyrooz 2015, 298). With regard to gang organization and behavior, the investigation of Latin gangs in Milan has shown that such groups possess several organizational and structural features, including activities related with group management, external relations with other gangs or gang members abroad, and use of violence to establish their presence on the territory.

Transnational Latin gangs—as the Latin King Chicago, the Trinitarios and Netas, and the Salvadorian MS13 and Barrio18—have therefore emerged as highly organized and involved in street level drug dealing (and drug trafficking in one case), far from being small and informal street gangs as mostly observed in the United States (Howell 2012;

Klein 1995). The final aim of this study, after having assessed gang activity, organization, and involvement in criminal behavior, is to compare organized Latin groups with organized crime (OC) to reveal whether there are differences and similarities with forms of organized criminal groups (OCGs). This enquiry is in line with recent criminological debate on gang organization and offending characteristics, through which scholars have investigated whether some gangs have evolved in or resemble forms of organized crime (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker and Curry 2002; Decker and Pyrooz 2014; Densley 2014; Franco 2008; Joe 1994; Kelly and Caputo 2005; Ward 2013; Weisel 2002; Whittaker et al. 2019)—comparing gangs with other criminal and terrorist groups (Decker and Pyrooz 2015; 2011; Smith, Rush, and Burton 2013). In particular, Decker and Pyrooz (2015, 302) have pointed out the four major dimensions differentiating street gangs from other criminal groups: *goals; organizational structure; levels of cooperation, leadership and structure;* and *turf/territory.* In this regard, results transnational Latin gangs in Milan engaged in different types of crimes, including property crimes, violent crimes, illegal carrying of weapons, and drug selling. Some gangs (i.e. the Latin King Chicago, the MS13, and the Barrio18) aimed at reinvesting the profits of drug sales into the group's illegal businesses. Despite this, the small scale and street level nature of such crimes, and the extensive use of violence, suggest that gangs' criminal behavior was more symbolic, i.e. aimed at reinforcement of group identity and sign of power to rival groups, rather than oriented to financial gain. Another common feature of OCGs, that is, the capability of maintaining control over affiliates through punishment for violation of rules, was instead consistently found in intercepted conversations. Group management was in fact one of the main aspects related with structural features of gangs with clear leadership roles/ranks and subdivision of tasks. However, the dynamic nature of leadership and lack of ability managing and/or organizing profitable illicit activities without being detected by the police indicates that gangs have not reached the maturity to evolve into OCGs. In fact, even if Latin gangs had reached a *consolidation* stage (Gottschalk 2016), these groups were still involved in frequent feuds to claim and/or reinforce the control over their turfs or territory (mainly parks),. Therefore, Latin gangs' criminal involvement, volatile structure, high visibility and street orientation confirms the argument made by previous scholars that street gangs are different than OCGs and that gangs are also not suitable partners for OCGs (or terrorist groups), "for whom the commission of offense is most

effectively completed in clandestine settings (Decker and Pyrooz 2015, 306; see also 2011).

Finally, scholars have recently investigated aspects related with governance to assess the extent to which gangs and OCGs "seek to regulate and control the production and distribution of one or more given commodities or services unlawfully" (Densley 2014, 518; see also Campana and Varese 2018). In London, some gangs have been found to be involved in OC and to have reached the governance stage, with instrumental use of violence, activities carried out within the legitimate business, and provision of services (e.g. protection, financial sustainment) to community residents (Densley 2014, 536–38; see also 2012). This governance-type of business has also been reported by Campana and Varese in their investigation of criminal groups in Salford and Derbyshire (UK). With regard to Latin gangs in Milan, none of such type of activities emerged through the investigation of judicial and police files, nor during expert interviews. This finding indicates that Latin gangs in Milan consisted of violent street groups displaying high levels of organization, though their evolvement did not take the form of organized crime as their members were not able to manage, control, or supply drugs or illegal services (see also Demoscopía 2007; Wolf 2012; 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

Street groups have been studied for more than a century in the United States, since Thrasher's (1927) investigation of 1,313 gangs in Chicago. Over the last decades, scholars have increasingly analyzed street gangs in Europe and elsewhere, often embracing a comparative approach to highlight similarities and differences between gangs across countries (Decker and Weerman 2005; Esbensen and Maxson 2012; Esbensen and Weerman 2005; Klein et al. 2001; Maxson and Esbensen 2016; Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008). Within the framework of gang organization and criminal behavior, recent theoretical and empirical contributions have devoted their attention to the extent to which some gangs resemble forms of organized criminal groups (Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker and Curry 2002; Decker and Pyrooz 2014; 2015; Kelly and Caputo 2005; Smith, Rush, and Burton 2013). In this regard, gang proliferation in Latin America—following the United States' mass deportation of arrested gang members and the coercive *mano dura* (iron fist) policies implemented by Central American governments (Hume 2007; Schuberth 2016; Siskind 2008; Wolf 2017)—has raised concerns over the transnational nature and function of criminal gangs originally emerged in the U.S. (i.e., the MS13 and the Barrio18) (e.g., see Schuberth 2016). Despite speculations that gangs as the MS13 are international criminal organizations (U.S. Department of Justice 2017), analytical reports have suggested that such groups are transnational gangs rather than transnational criminal organization, as "the gang is a small, part-time role player in international criminal schemes" (Dudley, Silva Ávalos, and Martínez 2018, 5).

Since the early 2000s, transnational Latin American gangs have also emerged in European countries. Previous studies have mostly focused on the cultural and migration processes associated with group of Latino immigrants in cities as Barcelona (Feixa et al. 2008; Feixa, Porzio, and Recio 2006; Feixa and Romaní 2014), Genoa (Queirolo Palmas and Torre 2005), and Milan (Bugli 2009; Bugli and Conte 2010; Bugli, Meola, and Milanesi 2008; Conte and Bugli 2008; Raspelli 2016). Over the last years, Milan has been the Italian and perhaps the European city mostly affected by criminal behavior of Latin gangs, with several incidents of serious and violent street crimes. Nonetheless, Milan has received little attention from criminological scholars. Most of what has been known about

Latin gangs in Milan has derived from sociological accounts, media outlets or police media releases (e.g., see Polizia di Stato 2013; LaPresse 2012), law enforcement reports (DIA 2014; 2015; 2016), and descriptions of the responses of the juvenile justice system (Moyersoen 2016). As a result, to date no empirical studies have conducted a systematic and exhaustive analysis of Latin gangs' criminal involvement in Milan. To fill this gap, this criminological inquiry has collected and analyzed multiple sources regarding Latin gangs in Milan to shed light on the factors associated with Latin gangs' formation and gangs' organizational structure and criminal activities for the period 2004-2016.

This investigation contributes to the research on gangs and criminal groups in manifold aspects which are related to the three main dimensions covered by the study: gang formation, gang organization and gang activity, and gang criminal involvement. In-depth interviews have provided first-hand accounts on the processes associated with gang formation, including the criminogenic nature of gang joining and gang violence. Juveniles and young adults who join gangs share common experiences related to migration from Latin American countries and difficulties of integrating in the new social context. These individuals sought street groups for a sense of belonging, social status and respect that gangs provided to Latino immigrants (Branch 1999; Decker and Curry 2000; Van Vugt and Hart 2004; Vigil 1988; White 2008; Woo et al. 2015; see also Warr 2002). An aspect that emerged clearly from interviews, however, is that gang joining resulted in members' violent and criminal behavior especially when drugs and alcohol were involved (see also Fleisher 2015). Interviews with social workers implementing intervention programs aimed at reducing criminal behavior of juvenile gang members revealed that gang affiliation, use of drugs and alcohol, and violence, were also the result of poor parental supervision and weak family relationships (for a systematic review, see Raby and Jones 2016). In the case of Milan, weak family ties represented the outcome of migration processes contributing to broken homes, intended as families in which young Latinos grew up with relatives as their parents had migrated to Europe. At the time of reunification with their children, parents—in general the mother—were not prepared to support the integration of youths into the new social contexts. The strain experienced as result of migration and lack of integration have led young Latinos to seek self-identification within street groups mostly composed of individuals of same ethnicity (see Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008).

With regard to gang activities and criminal behavior, the research has shown that Latin gangs were street groups organized around a wide range of activities. In terms of internal group structure, Latin gangs were far from being informal-diffuse youth groups but were rather criminal groups hierarchically structured with leadership roles, tasks, and codes of conduct. Gang leaders were extensively involved in managing the activities of the group, namely: group meetings, recruitment of new individuals or promotion of members to higher ranks, collection of dues from gang members, punishment for violation of gang rules, and discussion of criminal activities. Research findings have also shed light on the transnational dimension of Latin gangs in new territories. Extensive content analysis of intercepted conversations has highlighted that frequent transnational contacts occurred, though they represented informal communications rather than expression of an actual cooperation or coordination of criminal activities across countries. This finding suggests that Latin gangs in Milan did not qualify as transnational criminal organizations (for a debate on this topic, see Wolf 2010; 2012). In line with previous research on gang glocalization (Feixa and Romaní 2014; Van Hellemont and Densley 2019), Latin gangs have emerged as being local groups influenced by a global culture, a transnational gang brand comprising common styles, symbols, internal rules and roles. This aspect raises important questions on which groups' characteristic should be considered when transnational elements are found. Similarly to the debate on whether criminal behavior should be included as defining feature of gangs, should transnational criminal behavior of global groups be included to deem such gangs truly transnational? Are transnational contacts and shared symbolism and styles enough? Answers to these questions are likely to vary depending on the approach that scholars may embrace. While the present study has not found evidence of transnational criminal behavior to address Latin gangs as transnational criminal organizations, several transnational elements have emerged during the investigations. Wiretapped conversations with members in their motherlands have highlighted their deviant and/or criminal nature of such contacts (e.g., discussion of recruitment of new individuals from El Salvador and dialogues on the roles and status held by gang members in Milan). Moreover, Latin gangs have emerged to be groups adopting pre-existing rules and internal organizational roles and tasks. For these reasons, considering Latin gangs as *glocal* groups, and therefore limiting the definition of transnational groups to transnational criminal activities, would overlook the relevant

(non-criminal) features that contribute to the transnational dimension of these street gangs.

As for criminal behavior, the analysis has shown that Latin gangs were mostly involved in minor profit-oriented activities as drug dealing and property crimes. Criminal behavior and conflict with rival groups, among the most discussed topics in intercepted conversations, led to several incidents of violent crime. In this regard, quantitative analyses of co-offending events revealed that gang-related offenses comprised on average a great number of participants (i.e., five individuals), who had on average an extended criminal network of nine accomplices. Gang members therefore participated in large co-offending networks leading to violent crimes which in turn made these groups highly visible on the streets. Ultimately, these findings suggest that gangs possessed several indicators of group organization commonly reported in the literature (Decker 2001; Decker, Bynum, and Weisel 1998; Decker, Katz, and Webb 2008; Decker and Pyrooz 2015; Leverso and Matsueda 2019; Wolf 2012). While results on the evolution of gangs must be interpreted with caution—as data sources do not fully cover all the years considered and the observed evolution may derive from changes in law enforcement attentions leading to gather more intelligence data in the last years—important findings can be pointed out regarding the nature of Latin gangs. None of the Latin gangs have in fact emerged as being merely recreational groups as described by Densley (2014). All gangs addressed by this study were deeply involved in criminal behavior and violence was often a mean to gain respect and maintain reputation on the street. As for profit-oriented activities, monetary gains from property crimes and drug-related crimes were minimal. However, situating Latin gangs in Milan at the *criminal stage* identified by Densley (2014) may lead to underestimate the organizational capacity and criminal nature of these groups. Latin gangs displayed to have reached the *enterprise stage* (see Densley 2012, 530–35). In fact, most of the gangs were highly structured around leadership roles and tasks. Collective commitment to financial goals—or leaders' enforcement of orders requiring gang members' behavior to be profit-oriented—characterized most of the groups. Drug selling was perpetrated exploiting the local friendship, school, and community network of gang members and in one case the established reputation of a gang (i.e., Latin King Chicago) led the group to become involved in a drug trafficking network. Through an extended network of contacts, the gang purchased a large quantity of drug

and the revenues of drug selling had to be reinvested in the criminal market to acquire additional economic resources, military power (i.e., buying weapons), and predominance over rival groups. Despite this level of organization and seriousness of crimes committed, gangs did not show signs of having evolved into organized criminal groups. Gangs lacked control over criminal markets (e.g. street-level drug dealing) and had not matured into outlaw groups integrated into the society (Gottschalk 2016) capable of providing protection or illicit services to community members, typical of the *governance stage* (Densley 2014; see also, Campana and Varese 2018; Whittaker et al. 2019).

Future research may integrate these research findings and investigate the characteristics of Latin gangs in Milan and other Italian cities to further enhance our knowledge on this type of criminal street groups. Future studies may adopt in-depth interviews as a primary research tool to collect and analyze primary data from a larger sample, especially with regard to community members and former gang members. This would not only allow the validation of research findings but also constitute an opportunity to make a more thorough assessment of the factors associated with individuals' involvement into gangs, including criminogenic aspects. In addition, multi-site investigations that include different Italian cities in which Latin gangs have appeared (e.g., Genoa, Milan, Rome, Turin) may compare street groups across cities to highlight differences and similarities in terms of processes leading to gang formation and gang violence. Such studies should also investigate the extent to which street groups have external relations with the same gang in other territories to reveal their actual transnational criminal nature. In fact, to date transnational gangs have emerged as groups with same symbols, colors and rules but there is no evidence that some gangs have successfully or intentionally migrated to set up a group in new territories, suggesting the proliferation rather than the migration of gangs (see also Dudley, Silva Ávalos, and Martínez 2018; Méndez 2018; Wolf 2010; 2012). Moreover, further research may combine data on gang members' network of contacts, activities discussed, and network of accomplices to further contribute to the relation between gang organization and gang criminal behavior.

Further analyses may also devote special attention on juvenile offenders and gang violence when family reunification processes are in place. In fact, young age has emerged as being positively associated with rate of co-offending and involvement in violent offenses as murder/attempted murder. This finding highlights the great involvement in

offending and violent offending of juvenile gang members, a critical aspect that may be successfully prevented or mitigated providing social support to families in the process of reunification with their children from Latin American countries. Additional studies on individual level characteristics of criminal involvement, as the stability of co-offenders (i.e. the tendency of individuals of re-using the same offenders over time), could also contribute to intervention and prevention programs providing authorities and social services with information on the nature of criminal ties among gang members. In fact, while repressive law enforcement operations are necessary to disrupt criminal groups and their activities in urban contexts, preventive and integrating social approaches are also essential to reduce juveniles' involvement in gangs and offending in the future. In this regard, future systematic assessment of intervention programs would not only contribute to the literature on gang intervention (for a systematic review, see Higginson et al. 2015), but would also inform policymakers and practitioners about the common aspects among individual-based approaches that resulted in gang desistance or in a substantial reduction of juveniles' involvement into gangs.

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APPENDIX A

DATA CLEANING: INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES, CONVERSATIONS AND CO-OFFENDING DATASET

- Individual attributes dataset

Table 17. Example of data cleaning for gang members' role

ID	Formal_role	Gang_role	Role_CLEAN
N003	Leader	Underboss	Underboss
…	…	…	…
N016	Participant	High-ranking official	High-ranking official
…	…	…	…
N017	Participant	Affiliate	Affiliate
…	…	…	…
N028	-	Underboss	Underboss

Table 18. Comparison between Role_CLEAN and Formal_role

Role_CLEAN (%)	Formal_role (%)			Total
	Leader	Participant	Empty value (i.e. no charge)	
Leader	75.0	3.4	9.2	14.5
Underboss	13.9	3.4	3.7	4.7
High-ranking official	11.11	12.7	12.3	12.3
Affiliate	0	80.5	74.9	68.6
Total	100	100	100	100
n	*36*	*118*	*163*	*317*

- Conversations dataset

For each case study, it was built a conversations dataset through a comprehensive data entry including all meaningful conversation (i.e. exchange of information between two actively speaking actors) intercepted by the police. The conversations dataset contains data not only obtained from intercepted telephone calls, but also from intercepted SMS conversations (i.e. an exchange of SMS between two actors during the same day) and/or conversations occurred in other settings (e.g., the car of one gang member which was under surveillance). After the completion of data entry for each dataset, data cleaning was performed to detect and remove duplicates and correct possible mistakes occurred while building the dataset (see Table 19). The identification of duplicates was possible comparing the date and identity of people involved across all initial observations included

and ensured the consistency of data coding. The final datasets contain on the rows the conversations and the segments, identified with a unique alphanumeric ID, and on the columns their attributes (e.g. date, type of contact, actors involved). Each conversation ID may recur multiple times depending on the number of segment of conversations coded (Table 20). For a detailed procedure of data coding, see section 3.5.2).

Table 19. Data cleaning of conversations datasets for content analysis

Operation	Intercepted year/s	Initial n. of contacts	After data cleaning: Conversations datasets for content analysis		
			Meaningful conversations	N. of individuals	N. of themes
Barrio 18	2014	272	264	58	429
Trinitario	2012	326	193	38	319
Amor de Rey	2011-2012	769	529	184	881
Mareros	2011-2012	501	259	40	416
Street Fighters	2005	86	66	49	138
Total	**2005-2014**	**1,954**	**1,311**	**369***	**2,183**

**Unique number of individuals equals 364 (because some appear in more than one case study)*

Table 20. Example of the structure of conversations dataset

ID_conv	ID_seg	Operation	Date	…	Theme	Subtheme	Category
26	30	Street Fight	25/02/2005	…	Group manag	Meetings	Meetings
26	31	Street Fight	25/02/2005	…	Conflict	Territory	Control of territory
26	32	Street Fight	25/02/2005	…	Group manag	Financial sust	Payment of dues
26	33	Street Fight	25/02/2005	…	Criminal activity	Weapons	Firearms

Table 21. Number of different themes, subthemes, and categories discussed in each conversation, by case study

Code type	N	N. of conversations (%)				
		Street Fighters (n=66)	Mareros (n=259)	Amor de Rey (n=529)	Trinitario (n=193)	Barrio 18 (n=264)
Theme	1	75.8	83.4	77.9	79.3	74.6
	2	16.7	14.7	20.2	19.7	20.5
	3	6.1	1.9	1.7	0.5	4.6
	4	1.5	0	0.2	0.5	0.4
	M	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
	SD	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6
Subtheme	1	66.7	68.3	63.1	66.3	65.2
	2	12.1	18.2	23.3	19.2	22.0
	3	9.1	5.8	9.1	7.8	7.2
	4	3.0	4.3	2.8	3.6	3.4
	5	3.0	2.3	1.7	2.6	1.9
	6	1.5	0.8	0	0.5	0
	7	0	0.4	0	0	0.4
	8	3.0	0	0	0	0
	9	1.5	0	0	0	0
	M	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
	SD	1.8	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.0
Category	1	63.6	68.3	59.9	65.3	63.6
	2	10.6	17.8	23.8	19.7	22.4
	3	7.6	6.2	10.4	6.2	7.2
	4	6.1	3.5	3.8	5.7	4.2
	5	4.6	2.3	1.3	0.5	1.5
	6	1.5	0.4	0.6	1.6	0.4
	7	1.5	0.8	0.2	1.0	0
	8	1.5	0.4	0	0	0.4
	9	1.5	0	0	0	0.4
	10	1.5	0.4	0	0	0
	M	2.2	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.6
	SD	2.1	1.3	1.0	1.2	1.0

- Co-offending dataset

For each case study, all relevant information was coded and systematized into a co-offending dataset. The consistent identification and coding of the crimes and their attributes was possible because the police report such events in a separate section at the beginning of each document. The section of investigated crimes or criminal charges precedes criminal evidence gathered against individuals allegedly involved in such crimes. The relational dataset was constructed with each co-offending event as the unit of analysis (i.e. each row is the co-offending event). Each observation includes, on the columns, the attributes of the co-offending event (see Table 4).

Of the total number of observations included in the final dataset (n = 142), about 11 (n = 16) were co-offending crimes not directly addressed by the selected police investigations. In fact, 12 co-offending crimes took place between 2008-2010 and were dealt by law enforcement authorities as single events (before the subsequent investigations allowed investigators to link such crime incidents to between gang fights). The remaining 4 observations represent crimes committed by the MS13 in 2016, a Latin gang previously charged for unlawful association to commit a crime (in Operation *Mareros*). The identification of these last four events was possible as the police granted access to two short investigations (not included as case studies) addressing specifically those crimes.

TYPES OF CRIMES

Table 22. Crime category and aggregated types of crimes

Crime category	Co-offending crime type
Property	aggravated robbery, robbery, burglary, receipt of stolen vehicles, selling of stolen goods
Violent	affray (i.e. street fighting), aggravated battery, aggravated criminal injury, aggravated threat
Murder/attempted murder	murder, attempted murder, aggravated attempted murder
Drug-related	attempt to purchase large quantity of drugs, drug dealing of large quantities, drug possession and drug dealing, drug trafficking
Weapons	Illegal carrying of weapons (i.e. firearms, edged and bladed weapons)

APPENDIX B

Table 23. Pearson product-moment correlation matrix among variables used in regression analyses

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. N co-off. crimes	1															
2. Murder dummy	0.284***	1														
3. Role dummy	0.185**	-0.109	1													
4. Sex dummy	0.059	0.174*	-0.071	1												
5. Ethnicity dummy	0.045	0.296***	-0.028	0.109	1											
6. Year of birth	0.103	0.175*	-0.307***	-0.020	-0.017	1										
7. Age first offense	-0.031	-0.088	0.245***	0.048	0.267***	-0.815***	1									
8. Crim. history dummy	0.223**	0.085	0.074	0.135	0.033	-0.225**	0.204**	1								
9. Gang org. index	-0.110	-0.285***	0.030	-0.003	0.092	0.095	0.116	-0.092	1							
10. N. crimes against gangs	0.398***	0.393***	0.078	0.172*	-0.012	0.074	-0.119	0.212**	-0.054	1						
11. N crimes against gangs (stand)	0.638***	0.320***	0.144*	0.076	-0.125	0.051	-0.106	0.273***	-0.137	0.683***	1					
12. Crimes with off. with blood tie	0.179*	0.032	0.123	-0.090	-0.047	0.017	0.006	0.084	-0.039	-0.010	0.021	1				
13. Crimes with off. with shared blood tie/gang	0.199**	0.056	0.131	-0.020	-0.045	0.062	-0.050	0.086	-0.058	0.037	0.042	0.921***	1			
14. Crimes with off other gangs (%)	0.092	0.176*	-0.129	-0.061	-0.354***	0.103	-0.091	0.065	-0.333***	0.113	0.319***	0.162*	0.072	1		
15. Weapons dummy	0.459***	0.329***	0.021	0.129	0.188**	0.230**	-0.001	0.132	-0.174*	0.155*	0.221**	0.217**	0.220**	0.274***	1	
16. Co-off. network size	0.612***	0.202**	0.111	0.054	0.010	0.234***	-0.042	0.050	-0.103	0.317***	0.383***	0.233***	0.220**	0.303***	0.554***	1

*Legend: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001*

Table 24. Deviance and Pearson goodness-of-fit statistics for Poisson regression and negative binomial regression models of determinants of involvement in number of co-offending crimes

Model	Five-percent critical value	Poisson regression		Negative binomial regression	
		Deviance	Pearson	Deviance	Pearson
1	223.160	288.964	345.483	180.225	222.693
2	222.075	267.697	305.266	176.133	205.267
3	220.990	219.778	238.901	162.891	178.860
4	219.906	214.124	229.622	163.116	176.510

The selected negative binomial regression models are presented in Table 14 of section 4.2.2.

- Computation of gang organization index

The index was calculated taking into consideration twelve indicators of gang organization. A matrix of indicators by gang was built and for each gang it was marked whether that gang possessed that characteristic (yes = 1) or not (no = 0) (see Table 25). Four indicators, namely: the presence of 1) leaders, 2) specific roles (i.e. other leadership roles), 3) roles for females, and the 4) presence of subgroups, were assessed through the individuals' attributes dataset, where such variables were included. The presence of the remaining eight indicators was assessed by considering gang activities discussed by each gang in the wiretapped conversations. For this purpose, the conversations dataset created for content analysis was analyzed. For each gang, it was computed the relative frequency of all categories (i.e. activities) emerged in the wiretapped conversations. The activities were then ordered in descending order. For each gang, it was considered that it possessed that indicator of gang organization if the number of conversations related to that activity fell within the first 85 (cumulative frequency) of all categories coded, thus ensuring that such organizational aspect of the gang was truly important.

A sensitivity analysis was conducted extending the cumulative frequency to 90 and 95 to verify the robustness of the measure. All indicators were stable across the three strategies except for "rules or code of conduct" and "control of territory", which showed high discrepancy between 90-95 and 85 matrices (i.e. the two themes did not emerge as relevant in the 85 matrix while with the 90-95 threshold they did emerge as relevant). For this reason, it was decided to use the matrix constructed with the 85 cumulative frequency to ensure the proper identification of gang organizational indicators truly important for the gangs (i.e. to the extent that that indicator fell within the 85 of all conversations of

that gang) and avoiding misleading results coming from a too-inclusive approach. For each gang, the sum for all indicators was divided by the total number of indicators to obtain a continuous measure of organization, namely the *gang organization index.*

Table 25. Matrix of organization indicators by gang

Indicators	**COMANDO**	**LK**	**LK CHICAGO**	**LK LUZBEL**	**MS13**	**NETA**	**TRE BOL**	**TRINITARIO**	**BARRIO18**
1. Initiation rites	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
2. Leader	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3. Specific roles	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
4. Specific roles for females	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
5. Regular meetings	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
6. Specific rules or codes	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
7. Punishment for violation of rules	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
8. Colors/symbols/signs/clothes	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
9. Control of territory	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Presence of subgroups	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
11. Monetary crimes (drug-related)	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
12. Payment of dues	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Total	*7*	*5*	*10*	*7*	*7*	*8*	*4*	*9*	*8*
Org index	**0.58**	**0.42**	**0.83**	**0.58**	**0.58**	**0.67**	**0.33**	**0.75**	**0.67**

Note: LK stands for Latin King.

Table 26. Summary of regression analyses by dependent variables and independent variables included

	Dependent variables		
Independent variables	**N. co-offending crimes**	**Involvement in murder/attempted murder**	**Gang role**
Sex	✓	✓	✓
Ethnicity	✓	✓	
Year of birth	✓	✓	
Age at first offense			✓
Criminal history	✓	✓	✓
Gang organization index	✓	✓	
N. co-offending crimes			✓
Role	✓		
Total number of co-offenders (co-offending network size)		✓	✓
Involvement in murder/attempted murder			✓
Illegal carrying of weapons		✓	
N. crimes against other gangs	✓	✓	✓
Involvement in offending with co-offenders with shared kinship or relationship tie	✓		
Involvement in offending with co-offenders with kinship/relationship tie and gang membership			✓
Crimes with members of other gangs			✓

Note: green cells indicate the independent variables included in the analyses.

Table 27. One-way ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests. Tukey HSD and Benjamini-Hochberg post-hoc tests pairwise comparison results

Variable	Result of test	Significant Pairwise Comparison (p < 0.05)
N. of Co-offending crimes	$\chi 2(2)$ = 22.153, df = 8, p < 0.01[a]	COMANDO vs BARRIO18; TREBOL vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING vs COMANDO; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs COMANDO; MS13 vs COMANDO; TREBOL vs COMANDO; TRINITARIO vs COMANDO; TREBOL vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; TREBOL vs NETA; TRINITARIO vs TREBOL
Total N. of co-offenders	$\chi^2(2) = 41.065$, $df = 8$, p < 0.001[a]	COMANDO vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING vs BARRIO18; TREBOL vs BARRIO18; TRINITARIO vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING CHICAGO vs COMANDO; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs COMANDO; MS13 vs COMANDO; TREBOL vs COMANDO; LATIN KING CHICAGO vs LATIN KING; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs LATIN KING; MS13 vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs MS13; TREBOL vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; TRINITARIO vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; NETA vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TREBOL vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TRINITARIO vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TRINITARIO vs MS13; TREBOL vs NETA; TRINITARIO vs TREBOL
Avg. N of Co-offenders	$\chi^2(2) = 36.374$, $df = 8$, p < 0.001[a]	TREBOL vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs COMANDO; TREBOL vs COMANDO; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; TREBOL vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TREBOL vs MS13; TREBOL vs NETA; TRINITARIO vs TREBOL
Age at first offense	$F_{(8,191)} = 3.235$, p < 0.01[b]	COMANDO vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs BARRIO18
N. of violent crimes	$\chi^2(2) = 20.298$, $df = 8$, p < 0.01[a]	MS13 vs BARRIO18; TREBOL vs BARRIO18; TREBOL vs COMANDO
N. of weapons& drugs	$\chi^2(2) = 57.36$, $df = 8$, p < 0.001[a]	COMANDO vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING vs BARRIO18; LATIN KING CHICAGO vs BARRIO18; MS13 vs COMANDO; NETA vs COMANDO; TREBOL vs COMANDO; TRINITARIO vs COMANDO; MS13 vs LATIN KING; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs LATIN KING; NETA vs LATIN KING; TREBOL vs LATIN KING; TRINITARIO vs LATIN KING; LATIN KING LUZBEL vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; MS13 vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; TREBOL vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; TRINITARIO vs LATIN KING CHICAGO; MS13 vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TRINITARIO vs LATIN KING LUZBEL; TRINITARIO vs TREBOL

[a]Kruskal-Wallis test, Wilcoxon rank sum test with Benjamini-Hochberg correction. [b]One-way ANOVA, Tukey HSD's post-hoc test.

Table 28. Benjamini-Hochberg post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' number of co-offending crimes, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	**0.023**	-							
3. LATIN KING	0.631	**0.041**	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0.863	0.053	0.908	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0.863	**0.023**	0.501	0.547	-				
6. MS13	0.715	**0.023**	0.382	0.380	0.998	-			
7. NETA	0.607	0.053	1.000	0.998	0.591	0.501	-		
8. TREBOL	**0.028**	**0.002**	**0.023**	**0.028**	0.335	0.305	**0.028**	-	
9. TRINITARIO	0.965	**0.034**	0.863	0.998	0.593	0.591	0.908	**0.028**	-

Table 29. Benjamini-Hochberg post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' total number of co-offenders, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	**0.026**	-							
3. LATIN KING	**0.033**	0.408	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0.856	**0.021**	**0.016**	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0.241	**0.009**	**0.008**	0.180	-				
6. MS13	0.673	**0.033**	**0.029**	0.481	0.539	-			
7. NETA	0.408	0.564	0.539	0.245	**0.029**	0.066	-		
8. TREBOL	**0.009**	**0.002**	**0.001**	**0.002**	**0.033**	**0.021**	**0.002**	-	
9. TRINITARIO	**0.036**	0.539	1.000	**0.017**	**0.008**	**0.021**	0.388	**0.001**	-

Table 30. Benjamini-Hochberg post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' average number of co-offenders per incident, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	0.173	-							
3. LATIN KING	0.118	0.889	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0.274	0.591	0.220	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0.942	**0.028**	**0.037**	0.151	-				
6. MS13	0.724	0.220	0.086	0.313	0.952	-			
7. NETA	0.353	0.591	0.952	0.413	0.185	0.118	-		
8. TREBOL	**0.001**	**0.002**	**0.001**	**0.000**	**0.001**	**0.001**	**0.001**	-	
9. TRINITARIO	0.116	0.942	0.942	0.606	0.195	0.151	0.792	**0.001**	-

Table 31. Tukey HSD post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' age at first offense, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	**0.021**	-							
3. LATIN KING	0.055	0.999	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0.675	0.355	0.696	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	**0.008**	0.999	0.999	0.262	-				
6. MS13	0.663	0.226	0.505	1.000	0.126	-			
7. NETA	0.134	0.990	0.999	0.892	0.995	0.774	-		
8. TREBOL	0.302	0.965	0.999	0.982	0.975	0.948	0.999	-	
9. TRINITARIO	0.274	0.936	0.999	0.984	0.948	0.948	0.999	1.000	-

Table 32. Benjamini-Hochberg Post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' number of violent crimes, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	1.000	-							
3. LATIN KING	0.690	0.715	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	0.189	0.341	0.431	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0.431	0.431	0.715	0.715	-				
6. MS13	**0.033**	0.072	0.189	0.685	0.431	-			
7. NETA	0.929	1.000	0.929	0.431	0.685	0.189	-		
8. TREBOL	**0.014**	**0.005**	0.189	0.685	0.410	0.685	0.189	-	
9. TRINITARIO	0.410	0.375	0.751	0.685	0.975	0.410	0.685	0.189	-

Table 33. Benjamini-Hochberg Post-hoc pairwise comparison results for gang members' number of weapons and drug-related crimes, by gang (p < 0.05 in bold)

Gang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BARRIO18	-								
2. COMANDO	**0.001**	-							
3. LATIN KING	**0.001**	0.150	-						
4. LATIN KING CHICAGO	**0.000**	0.171	0.852	-					
5. LATIN KING LUZBEL	0.428	**0.001**	**0.001**	**0.000**	-				
6. MS13	0.167	**0.004**	**0.016**	**0.001**	**0.034**	-			
7. NETA	0.504	**0.001**	**0.004**	**0.001**	0.167	0.504	-		
8. TREBOL	0.945	**0.000**	**0.000**	**0.000**	0.396	0.148	0.396	-	
9. TRINITARIO	0.060	**0.002**	**0.028**	**0.007**	**0.017**	0.632	0.216	**0.014**	-

GANG LEADERSHIP: LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL DIAGNOSIS

Table 34. Logistic regression of gang leadership: specification error

Model	Role (D.V.)	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
1	_hat	0.988	0.244	4.05	0.000
	_hatsq	-0.019	0.193	-0.10	0.919
	_cons	0.011	0.238	0.05	0.962
2	_hat	0.981	0.281	3.500	0.000
	_hatsq	-0.022	0.208	-0.110	0.915
	_cons	0.009	0.223	0.040	0.969
3	_hat	1.055	0.281	3.750	0.000
	_hatsq	0.058	0.198	0.290	0.769
	_cons	-0.025	0.220	-0.110	0.910
4	_hat	1.237	0.284	4.350	0.000
	_hatsq	0.231	0.172	1.340	0.180
	_cons	-0.116	0.222	-0.520	0.602

Results show that the model is properly specified, as the linear predicted value of the model (_hat) is significant and the linktest of specification error (_hatsq) is not significant.

Table 35. Logistic regression of gang leadership: Goodness-of-fit tests: Akaike Information Criterion, Bayesian Information Criterion, and Pearson's chi-squared

Model	AIC	BIC	Pearson	Prob > *ChiSq*
1	250.064	5.440	187.56	0.183
2	249.318	1.395	129.25	0.266
3	249.024	2.399	144.47	0.165
4	244.600	1.274	164.90	0.091

Table 36. Logistic regression of gang leadership: collinearity diagnostic

Model	Variable	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	Eigenval	Cond Index
1	Sex	1.06	1.03	0.9477	5.4481	1.000
	Age at first offense	1.06	1.03	0.9438	0.6346	2.929
	Criminal history	1.14	1.07	0.8780	0.3938	3.719
	N of co-offending crimes	1.78	1.34	0.5610	0.3479	3.957
	Co-offending network size	1.63	1.28	0.6121	0.1162	6.847
	Involved in murder	1.13	1.07	0.8814	0.0435	11.186
	Mean VIF	**1.30**			Condition Number	18.541
4*	Sex	1.06	1.03	0.9426	4.4483	1.000
	Age at first offense	1.09	1.04	0.9199	1.1137	1.998
	Criminal history	1.18	1.08	0.8504	0.8732	2.257
	Involved in murder	1.16	1.08	0.8622	0.6846	2.549
	N crimes against other gangs	1.31	1.14	0.7639	0.5111	2.950
	Crimes with same gang co-offenders with kinship ties	1.02	1.01	0.9814	0.3103	3.786
	Crimes with members of other gangs	1.12	1.06	0.8916	0.0431	10.153
	Mean VIF	**1.13**			Condition Number	16.832

**Model 2 and model 3 yielded (almost) identical results of model 4 (i.e. mean VIF was equal to 1.13 and 1.12 respectively).*

INVOLVEMENT IN MURDER/ATTEMPTED MURDER: LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL DIAGNOSIS

Table 37. Logistic regression of involvement in murder: specification error

Model	Murder (D.V.)	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|
1	_hat	1.013	0.169	6.000	0.000
	_hatsq	-0.045	0.107	-0.420	0.671
	_cons	0.047	0.202	0.230	0.818
2	_hat	0.999	0.149	6.730	0.000
	_hatsq	0.057	0.079	0.720	0.470
	_cons	-0.083	0.214	-0.390	0.698
3	_hat	0.995	0.147	6.770	0.000
	_hatsq	0.051	0.073	0.700	0.482
	_cons	-0.079	0.215	-0.370	0.713
4	_hat	0.998	0.146	6.810	0.000
	_hatsq	0.011	0.074	0.150	0.879
	_cons	-0.018	0.219	-0.080	0.935

Results show that the model is properly specified, as the linear predicted value of the model (_hat) is significant and the linktest of specification error (_hatsq) is not significant.

Table 38. Logistic regression of involvement in murder: Goodness-of-fit tests: Akaike Information Criterion, Bayesian Information Criterion, and Pearson's chi-squared

Model	AIC	BIC	Pearson	Prob > *ChiSq*
1	230.306	-31.362	111.12	0.750
2	209.117	-49.273	144.65	0.786
3	206.907	-50.204	153.06	0.700
4	205.807	-48.026	167.27	0.629

Table 39. Logistic regression of involvement in murder: collinearity diagnostic

Model	Variable	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	Eigenval	Cond Index
1	Sex	1.03	1.02	0.9705	4.7392	1.0000
	Ethnicity	1.02	1.01	0.9786	0.6600	2.6797
	Year of birth	1.06	1.03	0.9434	0.5365	2.9723
	Criminal history	1.08	1.04	0.9266	0.0426	10.5488
	Gang organization index	1.02	1.01	0.9766	0.0217	14.7741
	Mean VIF	**1.04**		Condition Number		1201.1389
2	Sex	1.03	1.02	0.9675	4.7644	1.0000
	Ethnicity	1.04	1.02	0.9610	1.1045	2.0769
	Year of birth	1.08	1.04	0.9278	0.5503	2.9424
	Criminal history	1.17	1.08	0.8522	0.5171	3.0354
	Gang organization index	1.04	1.02	0.9636	0.0420	10.6503
	N crimes against other gangs	1.14	1.07	0.8798	0.0217	14.8195
	Mean VIF	**1.08**		Condition Number		1214.3534
3	Sex	1.04	1.02	0.9579	5.3327	1.0000
	Ethnicity	1.13	1.06	0.8882	1.1558	2.1480
	Year of birth	1.19	1.09	0.8429	0.5644	3.0738
	Criminal history	1.20	1.09	0.8343	0.5497	3.1146
	Gang organization index	1.13	1.06	0.8846	0.3372	3.9768
	N crimes against other gangs	1.27	1.13	0.7888	0.0391	11.6801
	Illegal carrying of weapons	1.47	1.21	0.6822	0.0211	15.8853

Model	Variable	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	Eigenval	Cond Index
	Mean VIF	**1.20**		Condition Number		1347.1358
4	Sex	1.04	1.02	0.9576	6.1117	1.0000
	Ethnicity	1.13	1.06	0.8860	1.1709	2.2847
	Year of birth	1.20	1.10	0.8325	0.5966	3.2008
	Criminal history	1.21	1.10	0.8288	0.5592	3.3060
	Gang organization index	1.13	1.06	0.8834	0.3546	4.1513
	N crimes against other gangs	1.35	1.16	0.7393	0.1472	6.4440
	Illegal carrying of weapons	1.77	1.33	0.5650	0.0389	12.5322
	Co-offending network size	1.52	1.23	0.6600	0.0210	17.0627
	Mean VIF	**1.29**		Condition Number		1450.9138

ANNEX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT
DOCTORAL THESIS

Research Project – International Ph.D. in Criminology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan/Transcrime – Joint Research Centre on Transnational Crime

Title: Transnational gang movements: violent *pandillas* in Milan

Contact details:
[removed for draft thesis]

Dear Participant,

My name is [removed for draft thesis] and I am a Doctoral student of the program of "International Ph.D. in Criminology" at the Catholic University of Milan/Transcrime. You are kindly invited to take part in this research. The present interview constitutes one of the research methods of the doctoral thesis which aims at enhancing the knowledge about the processes associated with the formation of Latin American gangs in Milan, also through the analysis of gang levels of organization and involvement in criminal behavior. This research adopts the gang definition provided by the Eurogang network (a group American and European gang scholars):

> *A street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.*[108]

The open-ended questions asked during the interview refer to the topics relevant to the empirical research and for which you have an expertise (or are familiar with) as a professional who has dealt with this type of gangs.

Between 5 and 10 experts are expected to take part in the study and each interview will last between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the availability of the participant. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and interrupt the interview at any time. Also, I kindly ask you to digitally record the interview for a

[108] 'Durability' means at least three months; 'street-oriented' suggests that the group spends a lot of time in public places; 'youth' can range from early adolescents to young adults; 'illegal' implies delinquent or criminal activities; and the term 'identity' refers to the group identity of its members.

better accuracy; you can ask to interrupt the recording at any time. You can have a copy of the transcription of the interview before the final document of the thesis is completed. All data and any personally identifiable information will remain confidential and be used for research purposes only. For any additional question, you can contact me at [removed for draft thesis] or at the phone number provided at the top of the document.

After reading this document, you are kindly asked to provide your consent to be interviewed so that your expertise/experience can be included in the study.

Thank you for your time, interest and willingness to participate in this study.

Signature of participant: _____

***** INTERVIEW GUIDE *****

Profession/Expertise: _____

Number of months/years dealing with Latin American gangs: _____

City/neighborhood of reference: _____

****

The following questions refer to 1. Latin street gangs and 2. Latin gang members for which you have and expertise based on your profession. Please, feel free to answer only the questions you believe you are familiar with or that you are comfortable answering. Also, avoid any names or personal information which may lead to the identification of other people.

Questions related to Latin street gangs

1. Which Latin American gangs have you dealt with?

OR What is your experience with Latin American gangs?

2. In which year did the mentioned Latin American gangs form or you first heard of?
3. What was the size (i.e. number of individuals) and average age of such gangs?
4. In which geographic area of the city of Milan were they active?
5. What role do women have or play in such groups?
6. What type of communication do gangs use (e.g., tattoos, symbols, clothes, colors)? What is the importance that such form of communication has for them?
7. What is the relationship between gangs and the community in which they live/d?

Questions related to gang members

1. What factors are associated with individuals' involvement into Latin gangs?[109]
2. Are we in front of gang members' migration or Latin American gang formation outside their context of origin?
    a. Are gang members illegal or legal immigrants?
    b. What characteristics do urban areas in which gangs form and evolve have?

[109] Gang formation includes aspects as recruitment, violence/criminal involvement, and gang culture which will also be investigated through content analysis of judicial files.

3. How do the ethnic aspect, intended as same nationality, and immigrant background influence individuals' involvement into a gang?

4. What type of socio-economic background do gang members have?

   a. Could you describe their family background?
   b. Could you describe gang members' educational background and/or their professional background and the one of their family members?

5. Are there any other questions or aspects that have not been mentioned but that you would like to discuss?

ANNEX B

Table 40. Themes, subthemes and categories for coding intercepted conversations into the conversations dataset

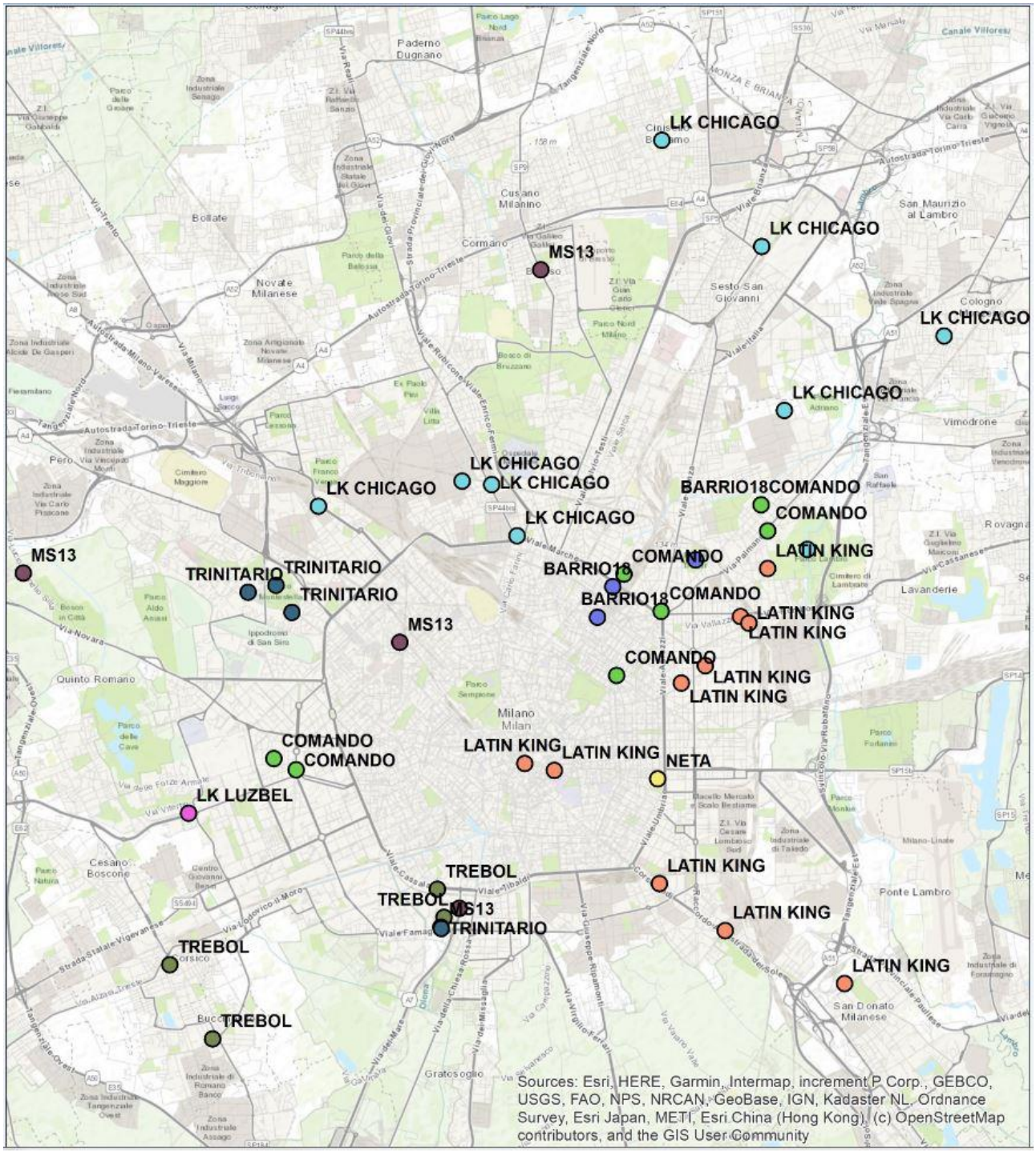
Theme	Subtheme	Category	The segment of the conversation—or information reported by the police about that segment—includes the discussion (planned or actual behavior) of topics referring to:	Y/N
Criminal activity	**Criminal behavior**	Drug-related crimes	Buying, dealing, possessing, or using small quantities of psychoactive substances (e.g. marijuana, cocaine) *OR* Drug trafficking (e.g. receiving, transporting, importing/exporting, or dealing large quantities of psychoactive substances)	
		Property crimes*	Theft or larceny, robbery, buying/selling stolen goods	
		Other crimes	Other illegal activities (e.g. armed protection activity, intended as acting as armed security guard) and/or criminal injury of individuals who are NOT gang members (i.e. not a between gang conflict)	
	Weapons	Firearms	Possessing, carrying, using, or selling/purchasing firearms	
		Edged and bladed weapons	Possessing, carrying, using, or selling/purchasing edged or bladed weapons (e.g. machete, knife)	
Conflict	**Outside gang confrontations**	Between gang conflicts**	Encountering, assaulting (i.e. threat of violence), or battering (physical violence) rival gang members	
		Police encounter	Encountering, being reported, being stopped or arrested by the police, or having gone to the police headquarter	
	Territory	Control of territory	Assaulting or battering rival gang members or other individuals within the gang turf, or referring to a specific urban area as a place controlled by the gang (e.g. park, square, nightclub)	
Group management	**Recruitment rituals and symbols**	Initiation of members**	Initiating new members to the gang through different methods, including: beating or commission of crimes (i.e. missions assigned to gang members to formally join the gang)	
		Gang rules	Possession, study or knowledge of gang rules (e.g. literature, guidelines), or referring to such rules to be part of the gang and/or enforce control of gang members	
		Gang symbols	Symbols having a meaning for the gang for attracting/recruiting new members, establishing their membership and/or ensuring their loyalty, including: colors, flags, necklaces, tattoos, music lyrics.	

	Meetings	Meetings	Meeting each other (or not being able to attend) as part of the weekly/monthly gang meeting (i.e. exclude meetings among members which do not occur as a "gang meeting")	
	Financial sustainment	Payment of dues*	Giving, collecting, receiving, ordering, or mentioning an obligatory payment (fee/due) from affiliates or provision of money (e.g. for members imprisoned)	
	Punishment	Absence at meetings	Threatening or actual punishment for missing a meeting	
		Leaving the gang	Threatening or actual punishment for leaving the gang	
		Violation of other gang rules	Threatening or actual punishment for violating other gang rules, including: non-payment of dues, disclosure of gang details, lack of respect towards other gang members, or unspecified reasons	
	Structure	Organizational structure, roles and tasks	Internal (hierarchical) organization of the gang (cliques, roles/tasks) and/or its change due to removal/downgrade/promotion of members' roles, or referring to tasks/responsibilities assigned to different roles within the gang	
	Within gang issues	Within gang issues	Problems among individuals belonging to the same gang (e.g. members discussing of being upset, angry, or other feelings related to internal issues)	
External relations	**Alliances**	Relations with allied gangs	Relations with members of allied gangs to help each other in case of necessity. *OR* Relations with allied gangs against rival gangs (e.g. assault/battery of rival gang members).	
	Local and transnational contacts	Transnational contacts	Contacts with gang members and/or leaders in other countries or referring to have spoken with gang members in other countries (e.g. El Salvador)	
		Relations with members imprisoned	Meeting, communicating (e.g. through letters) with gang members detained or in prison in Milan or other Italian cities or referring to members in prison	
		Other external relations	Residual category referring to relations with other subjects/bodies (e.g. local/diplomatic authorities as the Consulate)	

**Code as Property crimes conversations in which members are invited/ordered to commit a theft, burglary or robbery to collect money for the gang. **If the assault/battery of a rival gang member is a "mission", i.e. an act required to become officially affiliated to the gang, code the conversation as Group management – Recruitment rituals and symbols – Initiation of members*

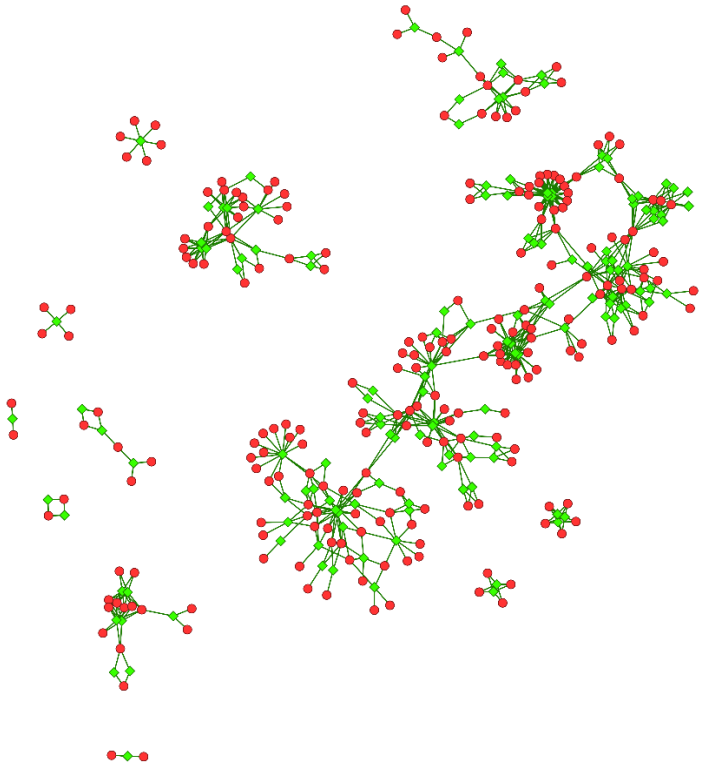
ANNEX C

Figure 16. Presence of Latin gangs in Milan ever recorded over the period 2004-2016



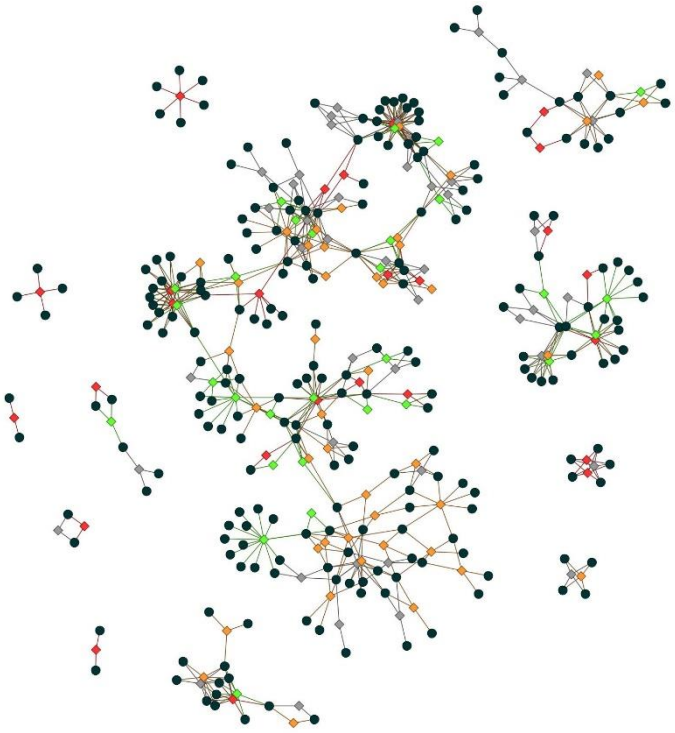
The colored circles represent the urban areas that gangs considered as their turf/territory or where gangs held their meetings, as reported by law enforcement authorities. The position on the map reflects the location or address extracted through in-depth reading of police and judicial files. The map shows that gangs were not clustered in specific neighborhoods but they were rather spread in the urban area of Milan.

Figure 17. Two-mode co-offending network (2004-2016)



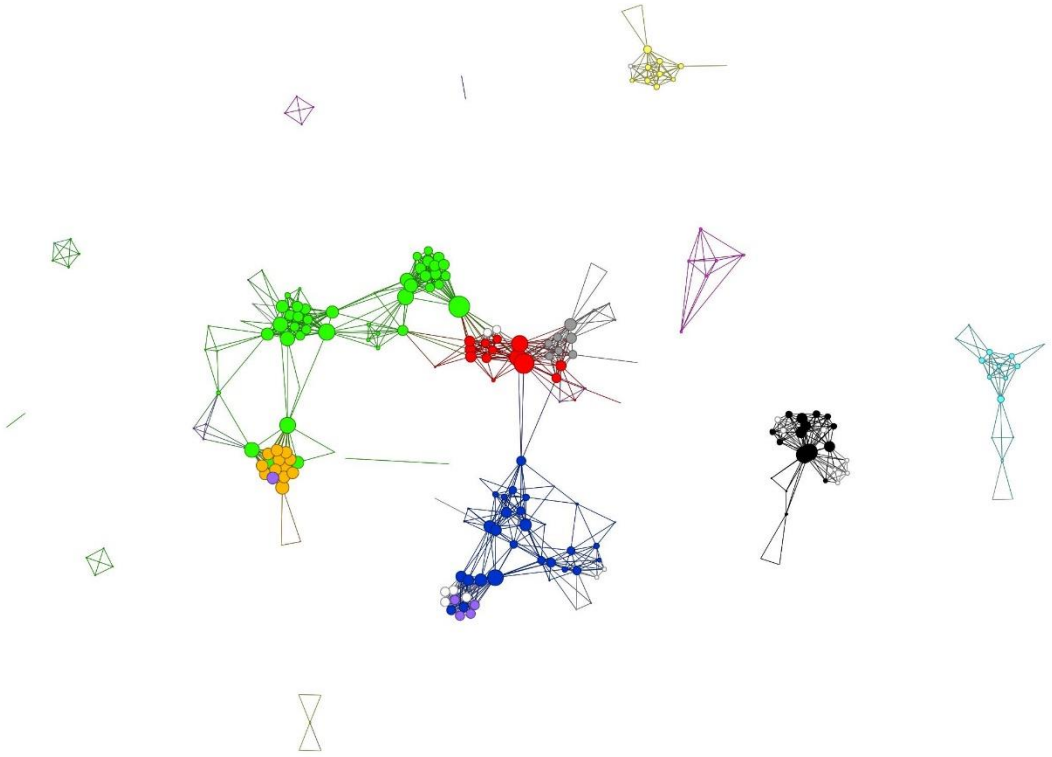
Green diamonds are co-offending events, red circles are offenders

Figure 18. Two-mode co-offending network by crime type (2004-2016)



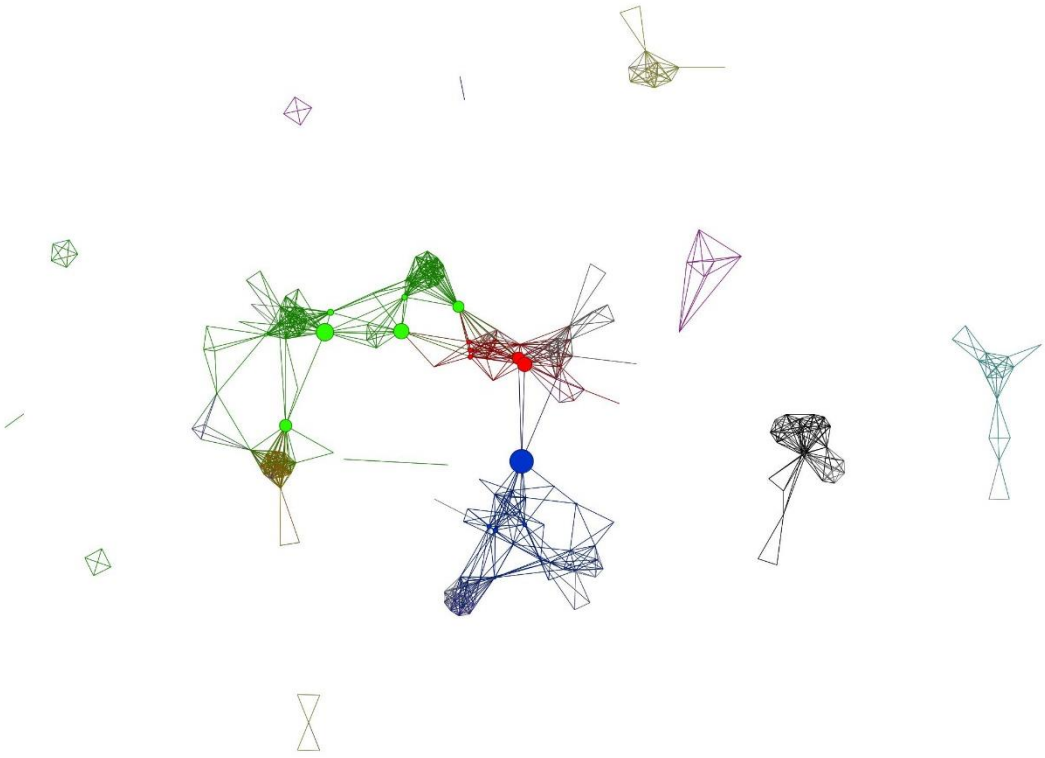
Diamonds are co-offending events. In particular: green diamonds are weapons/drug-related crimes, red are murder/att. murder, grey are property crimes, and orange are violent crimes. Black circles are offenders.

Figure 19. One-mode co-offending network (2004-2016), nodes sized by degree centrality



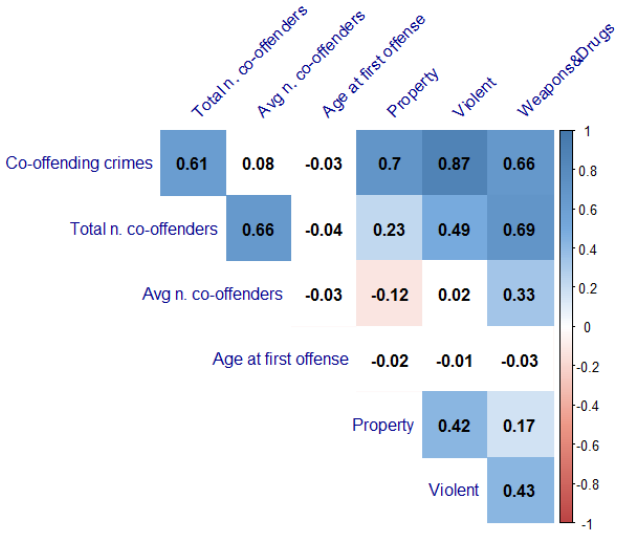
Gangs are displayed by different colors. Black is Barrio18; Fuchsia is Comando; Light Blue is Latin King; Blue is Latin King Chicago; Red is Latin King Luzbel; Green is MS13; Grey is Neta, Purple (lower side of the graph, near blue/orange) is Other gangs; Orange is Trebol; Yellow is Trinitario; White are non-gang members.

Figure 20. One-mode co-offending network (2004-2016), nodes sized by betweenness centrality



Gangs are displayed by different colors. Black is Barrio18; Fuchsia is Comando; Light Blue is Latin King; Blue is Latin King Chicago; Red is Latin King Luzbel; Green is MS13; Grey is Neta, Purple (lower side of the graph, near blue) is Other gangs; Orange is Trebol; Yellow is Trinitario; White are non-gang members.

Figure 21. Correlogram of Pearson's correlation for co-offending variables



Colored cells indicate statistically significant correlations at the 10 percent level. Blank cells indicate non-significant correlations at the 10 percent level.