

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH MAPS METHODS BEHIND SUCCESS STORIES FROM RIO DE JANEIRO'S FAVELAS

Pioneering research in Rio de Janeiro's favelas has mapped the causes of social exclusion and identified methods used to help people break free of their backgrounds which could improve the lives of the urban poor across the globe. The report is due to be launched today (Sept 13) in Rio in the favela of Cantagalo, between Copacabana and Ipanema.

Directed by Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch of the Institute of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the research was supported by a partnership between grass-roots organizations AfroReggae and CUFA, the charitable foundations of Itaú Bank, Fundação Itaú Social and Instituto Itaú Cultural and UNESCO-Brasilia Office.

More than 20 per cent of Rio's population lives in favelas, the hillside shanty towns that for decades were plagued by shoot-outs between rival drug gangs. After winning bids to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, Rio has unveiled a host of projects to improve the city, including community-based police units (UPPs) which have begun to pacify the drug gangs in many areas and dramatically reduce crime. Further transforming the lives of favela residents by reducing poverty and inequality so that they can begin to feel integrated with the rest of the city is an ongoing challenge, largely being tackled by grass-roots organizations, which the research has focused on.

The study, "Underground Sociabilities", was conducted in four different communities of Rio, including City of God, the setting of the 2002 award-winning movie. Researchers entered dangerous no-go zones, sometimes hearing gunfire, to interview over 200 favela residents as well as the leaders of community-based organizations, the police and other external bodies. They also analysed 130 social development projects.

Despite the extraordinary successes of the Brazilian economy, life chances for the favela's inhabitants – mainly young and black - remain limited. However, researchers found that despite being blighted by poverty, violence, discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society, most remain hopeful and optimistic about their communities and their future. By examining the feelings, perceptions and experiences of favela inhabitants and analysing the support structures which help some to survive and prosper, the study has provided a ground-breaking insight into what is required to help people lift themselves out of poverty and social exclusion.

Key conclusions were:

- Grass-roots organizations, such as Afroreggae and CUFA, are innovative because they pay attention to individuals and focus on developing self-esteem; use the arts, local culture and sport to foster social cohesion and construct positive imaginations; and act beyond their communities of origin developing links between the favelas and the city.

- This model of social development is transferable and can inform similar contexts across the world because it relies on human universals: the power of the human self as agent, the power of the imagination and the power of dialogue.

Professor Jovchelovitch commented: “Our data shows that the family is central to socialization, but so are grass-roots organizations that work as parents by proxy. Mentoring people, offering them strong role models and emotional support alongside educational and training opportunities, is what ultimately allows re-writing of life stories. In the favelas, this can mean the difference between being a drug dealer or being an activist – and that, for many, means the difference between life and death.”

She added:

“We have mapped the work methodology of community organizations to identify key indicators of best practice that can be used to inform public policy in Brazil and beyond.

“This is pioneering research supported by an inter-institutional international collaboration between academia, grassroots organisations, the private sector and UNESCO-Brasilia Office. We are proud to connect our knowledge and research expertise with diverse partners to produce research that is committed and engaged in pressing social issues.

“We have mapped routes of exclusion in the context of deprivation. We have understood the causes and remedies. A central simple lesson is that psychosocial structures of support and social policy are required to protect young people in vulnerable communities.”

Joanna Bale
LSE Press Officer

NOTES TO EDITORS

The full report entitled *Underground Sociabilities: Identities, culture and resistance in Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas* is available in English. For more information please go to www.undergroundsociabilities.co.uk

To request an interview with Professor Jovchelovitch, please contact Joanna Bale, LSE Press Office, j.m.bale@lse.ac.uk