

Executive Summary

Underground Sociabilities investigated pathways of exclusion and social development in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. It examined the lived world of favela communities and the work of two local organisations AfroReggae and CUFA, to systematise and disseminate effective experiences of social development.

Directed by LSE, the research was supported by a partnership between AfroReggae, CUFA, LSE, Itaú Cultural and Itaú Social (the charitable foundations of Itaú Bank), UFRJ and UNESCO. The study also engaged advisors from academia, social movements, policy communities, industry and government. Its methodology was participatory, consulting stakeholders throughout the process.

The project comprised three studies: an investigation of the lifeworld of favela communities, a systematic study of favela organisations AfroReggae and CUFA and an investigation of elite external observers in the wider city. Our approach was ethnographic and multi-method:

- questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 204 favela residents
- analysis of documents pertaining to 130 projects of social development
- narrative interviews with 10 AfroReggae and CUFA leaders
- interviews with 16 external observers and partners, with special emphasis on the police

Fieldwork was conducted between October 2009 and April 2010 in four communities of Rio de Janeiro: Cantagalo, City of God, Madureira and Vigário Geral. The communities were selected considering location in the city and link with AfroReggae and CUFA. Cantagalo and Vigário fit the accepted definition of favelas, whereas City of God was built as a planned area for relocating favela-dwellers displaced from the city centre during the 1960s. Madureira is a formal neighbourhood surrounded by favelas.

Theoretical inspiration was drawn from the concepts of sociability, social representations, imagination and psychosocial cartographies. Findings enabled the development of the concept of *psychosocial scaffoldings*.

The Context and Research Problem

- Rio is an unequal city; more than 20% of its population live in favelas.
- Residence in a favela impacts negatively on income, education, teenage pregnancy, literacy and mortality at young age.
- The rooting of drug trading in the favelas during the 1970s and 80s created parallel norms and regulations in favela communities and triggered a territorial war between drug trade factions and the police. Favela-dwellers were caught in-between.
- Violence, lack of services and socioeconomic deprivation in the favelas created social exclusion and separation between the favelas and the asphalted areas of Rio, known in the city as the division morro/asfalto (hill/asphalt).
- Favelas were pushed underground and became invisible, their diverse community life shut off by geographical, economic, symbolic, behavioural and cultural barriers.

- Since the 1990s new actors – young, mainly black, favela dwellers – entered the public sphere to organise responses to poverty, violence and segregation challenging the traditional model of the NGO and repositioning favela populations in the Brazilian public sphere

The Life World of the Favela

Social Institutions and the Experience of the Self

- Life stories are dominated by the experience of hardship, suffering and hard work; all participants tell stories of discrimination, poverty, loss and struggle to live a positive life.
- The family is central for favela-dwellers despite being an unstable reality in their lives. Almost 70% of 12-17 year olds report an absent father, more than 25% report an absent mother and almost 20% report both parents absent; a stable family is considered essential for the self and for a positive life, with grandmothers and mothers playing a major role in stabilising life trajectories;
- The centrality of the drug trade is unequivocal; it has been provider, legislator and organiser of everyday life in the favela, offering a parallel system of behavioural codes as well as a 'professional career'. The right to the city is dictated by drug bosses, who control borders and space within and between communities. All respondents have experienced loss and suffering caused by the drug trade.
- The police are the main face of the state, seen by favela dwellers as persecutory and aggressive, making no difference between residents and drug-dealers.
- Religiosity and faith are central; most participants report belief and church practices as a means to sustain a positive pathway of socialisation and/or to change one's life.
- Bottom-up organisations are a source of occupation, intersubjective support, competencies and identification; they compete directly with the drug trade for providing models and opportunities for young people.
- Conviviality and enjoyment are vital to favela life and to the experience of the self; there is intense sociability inside the favela.
- Structures and actions of support provided by tangible, stable and loving role models are necessary if individuals are to make positive choices and escape from the drug trade: we call these *psychosocial scaffoldings*.
- Psychosocial scaffoldings are provided by manifold institutions across the lifespan and protect against marginalisation. This finding challenges hitherto conceptions of psychosocial support as an exclusive provision of the nuclear family and effective mainly in early years of life.

The Community and the City

- There is a strong sense of belonging, cohesion and attachment to place in favela communities.
- Paradoxically residents live in fear of the drug trade and the police, but feel safer in their communities than they do in the city.
- Participants are reluctant to cross borders into the city: the division hill/asphalt is lived as stigma and discrimination.

- There are important differences in cohesion, fear and satisfaction with neighbourhoods and the city: place defines peoples' experiences and contexts of poverty should not be treated as homogenous.
- Participation in AfroReggae and CUFA affects the way people perceive their ability to influence what happens in the community, with those participating more likely to express a critical assessment of their limited power;
- Strong social capital coexists with a sharp perception of the divisions between the favela and the city; despite the difficult context, favela communities maintain a positive link with place and neighbours.
- 93% of participants like to live in Rio but the affective bonds that link favela communities to the city are marked by ambivalent representations of Rio as both beautiful and violent.
- Favela-dwellers cope with a divided society developing two sets of representations: they see the city as a place regulated by ambivalent rules where one is just an isolated and vulnerable 'individual'; the favela, in contrast, has clear rules and one is a 'person' supported by friends and family.

Police-Favela Relations in Transition

- Policing Rio de Janeiro is changing, as evidenced in the work of the Pacification Police Units (UPPs). The police are seeking to transform stereotypes and the nature of their engagement with favelas.
- More than half of all participants who referred to the UPPs view them as positive, 21% see them as negative, 13% feel ambivalent and 11% think that nothing has changed.
- Fear and hope are feelings that coexist in the communication between the favelas and the police.
- There is a considerable way to go in changing representations forged by negative experiences of favela-dwellers with the police. Both sides are in dialogue to transform favela-police relations.

AfroReggae and CUFA

Who Are They?

- AfroReggae and CUFA are hybrid organisations that combine being NGOs, social movements, entrepreneurs, artists and social workers; they emerged out of favelas and are solidly connected to their lifeworld.
- Life trajectories of leaders and activists are similar to those of favela residents; they operate as mirror stories that reflect pathways widely found in favela communities: experiencing failure, loss and suffering and standing up again.
- '*Contar a vida*' (to tell one's life story) is a central methodology used as a leverage, as platforms for identification and as examples of survival and determination, as depositories of hope and potential futures.
- External observers and partners see AfroReggae and CUFA as innovators, agenda setters projecting peripheral actors in the Brazilian public sphere

- AfroReggae and CUFA act inside the community and in the city; they seek individual and community development and communication between favelas and the city.

What Are They Doing? Method of Work

- A first key method is attention to personal trajectories and the individual self as a strategy of community development: participants report workshops, training and artistic activities as providing everyday structure, competencies and support to the self; programmes to develop social skills and employability reinforce positive socialisation and social integration.
- They invest in the self as a central asset for social development: social change requires individuals who understand themselves as agents and believe in their capacity to act as protagonists of their own lives.
- They offer psychosocial scaffoldings: intersubjective structures and actions of support that sustains the self as a force for social integration
- A second key innovation are social technologies of the imagination: AfroReggae and CUFA use arts and culture to connect the city and subvert negative stereotypes of the favela; they pull cultural resources, engage imagination and creativity and showcase the culture of the favela to the city, to the country and, more recently, to the world.
- Resources of local culture, in particular of Brazilian black heritage, are identified and used for social development and healing: sociability, joy, celebration and potential spaces are assets used to counteract suffering and exclusion.
- A third key innovation are crossings and mediations: AfroReggae and CUFA establish unconventional partnerships with social movements, media, the state and the private sector to push favelas into the agenda of the city and offer new lenses to read favela environments
- AfroReggae and CUFA are conflict mediators of favela territories: they provide access and communicate with the drug trade and with the police.
- They regenerate the built environment of favelas and construct spaces for positive sociability in the city: examples are the Cultural Centre Waly Salomão in Vigário Geral and the *Viaduto* in Madureira.

Challenges and Risks

- Sustainability and capacity building: fast growth stretches structures and competences to engage with partners and to respond to a wider brief and intervention
- Co-optation versus cooperation: engaging state and markets may lead to social movements' losing purpose and connection to grassroots.
- Leadership styles and organisational culture: distribution of authority and continuity of personnel constitute challenges; both organisations rely on strong leaders and use their charisma as organisational culture. AfroReggae relies on a centralised structure and hierarchy; CUFA is seeking to distribute leadership and a network process.

The Routes of Underground Sociabilities

- The interplay between context and the individual is essential to understand routes of socialisation for underground sociabilities.

- Favela dwellers inhabit a segregated world, with fragile institutions in the presence of a criminal business that until very recently provided a state-parallel public order.
- The vast majority of people living in the favelas are hardworking, determined and brave. They survive on their social capital: social cohesion and conviviality. Yet the context poses hard challenges for life trajectories.
- Cartographies of community life show different borders between the favelas and the city: the looser the borders, the larger the horizons of the self and the networks available for development and identification.
- Findings show that it is possible to resist the environment and reaffirm a sense of agency; resistance to criminal activities is possible and pervasive in favela life.
- Resilience and the capacity to challenge context build on psychosocial scaffoldings that moderate the need for affiliation, work and consumption as well as the hardship which otherwise lead people towards the drug trade.
- AfroReggae and CUFA provide psychosocial scaffoldings and develop new pathways to citizenship and integration between favelas and the city.
- Psychosocial scaffoldings allow individuals to escape careers in crime and contribute to rewriting the self in terms of cognitive, emotional and social skills.
- These organisations act as family, state and even the private sector, building support, developing skills, organising employment and pushing a new set of positive representations of the favelas and of the city as a whole.
- Flexible urban frontiers enlarge the self, regenerate territories of exclusion and give favela-dwellers the right to the city. Keeping borders open contributes to the transformation of identities and the development of citizenship. These actions connect a divided society and reverse the formation of ghettos that isolate and inhibit the vibrant encounters potentially available in the contemporary city.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Individual and social factors interact to shape choices and decision-making in the routes of socialisation.

- study the psychology of poverty and the individual needs, motivations and aspirations that mediate choices in contexts of deprivation
- acknowledge that responsibility for poverty does not lie with the poor: research robustly demonstrates that social context decisively shapes individual choices; trajectories are not something individuals decide alone
- work simultaneously at the micro and macro levels, paying attention to both individuals and communities.

Psychosocial scaffoldings allow resilience in contexts of deprivation and can be provided by manifold support institutions.

- assist and invest in families, however precarious
- emphasise the education of girls and develop programmes to support women;

- develop male identification models, strengthening the figure of the father and other male caretakers in the route of socialisation
- increase the range and quality of services in favela environments, in particular education.

Bottom-up organisations and social movements offer lessons and directions worth paying attention to

- use successful bottom-up actions as models and commit the state to scale them up, introducing more services and opportunities for favela dwellers.
- work with favela organisations in designing and implementing social policies; do not expect them to compensate for the absence of the state and other services.
- commit the private sector to understand the economy of the favela and consider the ethics of bringing business to socially excluded territories.

Subterranean sociabilities are mobile and can be changed by social policy and an ethics of care ; people can and do change their lives.

- provide platforms for young people to escape close territories and to form new identities.
- develop narratives that convey positive potential futures
- invest in research that documents the thinking and perceptions of young people, their role models, dreams and aspirations
- recognise that no identity is 'pure' and homogenous: there are multiple layers of identification in all human beings as there are multiple identities in different territories and institutions across the city.

Lessons and Future Directions

- The efficacy of bottom-up movements such as AfroReggae and CUFA derives from the culture, identity and wisdom of the communities which they are part of and represent.
- In their responses to social exclusion, subterranean sociabilities offer to the city an example of positive citizenship and pathways for action.
- Brazilian social capital and capacity for innovative social technologies are produced by multiple actors in the collaborations and partnerships of the democratic public sphere.
- This model of social development draws its efficacy from the situated wisdom and social solidarities produced by people who live a difficult life, face poverty and violence and yet remain hopeful and optimistic about their communities and their future.
- Social technologies of the imagination trigger social development: activities around art and culture, sociability and social solidarities have power to counteract experiences of exclusion and push community mobilisation for social change
- Rio's model of social development is transferable because it is founded on universal dimensions: the human self as protagonist, the power of the imagination and the value of dialogue as tool for managing difference and conflict.
- Public policy is challenged: how to articulate entrepreneurship, business and social inclusion; how to scale up services and take transport, education, health, banks and shops to the favela

and how to engage its culture that is, after all, the culture of Brazil, are questions that will require an answer from the state, the private sector and the whole of Brazilian society.

- To recognise the potentials of favela economy, culture and people requires social policy and commitment to social inclusion, without which Brazilian development will always be partial.