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Safe and Inclusive Cities Exchange 2017

Social cohesion: the missing link?

A study in South Africa and Brazil

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Social Cohesion: the missing link in overcoming violence, inequality and poverty?

- Three year mix–method international comparative study in Brazil and South Africa
- Ethnographic investigations of two interventions in Cape Town -Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPPU) and Pacifying Police Units (PPU) in Rio de Janeiro.

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Purpose of the study

- Engage with the problem of violence and its relationship to social cohesion
- Social cohesion – ‘the factors that hold society together’ (SA Presidency)
- Characteristics contribute to connectedness and solidarity in democratic societies
- Give it ‘southern’ content, critically interrogate it in local and international versions utilising ethnography
- Dominant paradigm of social cohesion based on research and assumptions about social solidarity drawn from the experience of the global north

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Cohesion and violence

- Social cohesion something that can 'protect' citizens against violence
- Concept of collective efficacy (Sampson)-how social ties can be translated into collective action that can prevent violence
- Social disorganisation hypothesis that 'lack' of social cohesion or 'weak' social cohesion linked to lack of social control, disorder and violence

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Violence prevention in contested contexts: an ethnographic method

- Ethnographic evaluation of the way in which violence prevention interventions in SA and Rio interacted with existing social relations and organisation
- The context of the interventions, the processes through which they were implemented and the perspective of community members on outcomes
- How social relations and cohesion were understood – and produced – by social actors themselves.
- 1 year fieldwork in each site-close to 100 interviews, focus groups, participant observation

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Reorganising the social fabric

- Very different but both attempted to 'recapture' the space of the favela and township from informal sources of authority/regulation
- Introduce formalisation of space and social relations
- Rio-regain territorial control of the favelas and establish state police as normative regulators of social life
- Khayelitsha-urban upgrading and urban planning to create an 'ordered' city and citizen

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Reorganising the social fabric

- Implicitly influenced by ideas from social disorganisation theory
- Spatial distribution of crime linked to concentrated disadvantage in urban neighbourhoods
- Social cohesion or connectivity between citizens is critical to mediating this link
- Social ties, shared norms and social interaction creates informal social control
- Addressing crime - spatially targeted interventions that try to change social relations at neighbourhood level

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PPU: re-asserting the state

- Pacifying Police Units (PPU) –launched in 2008 in designated favelas in Rio de Janeiro
- Absence of the state in favelas key reason for control by criminal groups
- Regain control by the state, reduce armed confrontations and integrate into wider city
- Secondary objective-guarantee rights of citizenship and meet the social needs of the population
- ‘Proximity Police’ methodology-move away from reactive, sporadic interventions to long term prevention
- Forcible occupation by military police

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PPU: reducing violence

- Criticised on numerous grounds
- PPU did lead to a significant decline of armed confrontations between traffickers and between traffickers and the police
- Reduction of overt weapons carrying by traffickers
- Increased freedom of movement for favela inhabitants and reduction of stigma

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PPU: a sustainable solution?

- To what extent has the intervention created long term changes in social relations among citizens and between citizens and the state that would make violence reduction sustainable?
- Two field sites-Tabajaras and the neighbouring settlement of Cabritos and Cidade de Deus
- Significantly different therefore useful comparison
- Tabajaras/Cabritos-small communities in tourist zone of Copacabana, mobile pop, quite integrated into Rio
- Cidade de Deus-large favela in Western area, less mobile pop, less integrated, strong place identification, forcible removal from Rio centre

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Tabajaras/Cabritos

- PPU led to a significant reduction in armed violence, improved sense of security and reduced stigma linked to the favela
- 'Peace' and 'war'
- Police became the dominant source of regulation and authority
- Process of gentrification pushed poorer residents out (increase in rent and prices in shops, formalisation of services)
- Inflow of new residents disrupted social bonds, newcomers ignorant of local norms, perception of disorder and disrespect

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Cidade de Deus

- Reduction of armed violence not as significant but has increased freedom of movement
- Complicated the 'rule of the favela' where traffickers exercised sole authority
- Dual system of authority –police and traffickers, residents 'walk a tightrope'
- Social regulation by PPU had undermined social cohesion (music events)
- Negative impact on local social organisation-role and resources appropriated by PPU

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VPUU: a normative imaginary

- Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) – initiated in 2004 as pilot in Khayelitsha township
- Ameliorate apartheid legacy through upgrading
- Heavily influenced by international models – particularly German Development Bank's model of integrated violence prevention through urban upgrading

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VPUU: a normative imaginary

- Shaped by a normative conception of the ideal Western city characterised by formality, order, and an imaginary of the individualised self-regulating economic rational actor
- GDB emphasises using 'conventional urban planning tools' to create managed urban space and formalised local ownership to 'stabilise' the social environment

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VPUU: translating models

- Difficulty of translating models of social order and citizenship formulated in the global north to cities in the global south such as Khayelitsha
- Translation between two knowledge systems- high modernity emphasising 'rationality' and autonomy and *Ubuntu*, an ethos of community and reciprocity.
- Not unique to VPUU. Watson gap between urban planners conception of 'proper communities' and rationality of those attempting to survive in African cities

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VPUU: upgrading informal trading

- Khayelitsha-Deep informality, state accepted provisionally, ethics of communitarianism and local conceptions of community justice involving violence.
- Key site where tensions emerged related to the creation of formal stalls for trading
- Built on land where informal trading took place previously

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VPUU: upgrading informal trading

- Practical and symbolic contestation over the 'ownership' of this space
- VPUU –formalisation only means of creating legitimate ownership of space
- Traders asserted the validity of pre-existing investment in this space
- The legitimacy of the forms of social and economic practice that pre-dated VPUU

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VPUU: upgrading informal trading

- Provided important services such as access to water, electricity, shelter
- Seen as undermining the autonomy of traders and existing relationships of sociality and reciprocity that underpinned survival businesses
- Traders compelled to conform to a Western model of entrepreneurship and formal regulation to use kiosks
- Experience a loss of voice and agency

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Conclusion

- To what extent were these interventions able to 'recapture' space and social relations in SA townships and Brazilian favelas in ways that could reduce violence?
- Problematic starting premise of a deep suspicion of 'informality', which was seen as unequivocally linked to violence and disorder
- Corollary-with formalisation comes order and peace
- Research showed the limitations of this model for violence prevention and the complexity of negotiating the boundaries of formality and informality

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Conclusion

- In SA a normative imaginary of the ideal city and citizen, failed to recognise and harness the existing networks of solidarity and cohesion and the resources (social, infrastructural, imaginative) already invested in local space
- In Brazil PPU set up social projects, which had a negative impact on social organisations as funders directed their support to them
- Until violence prevention is genuinely community driven it is unlikely to succeed in achieving the meaningful transformation of social relations that could lead to just, inclusive and long-lasting peace

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