Research - Project Social networks, sociability and segregation, by Prof. Livre-Docente Eduardo Marques

I. Introduction

Poverty and social inequality are among Brazilian major problems. Although the subject has been intensively analyzed in Brazil, it has often been with a vision centered on individual attributes or on the workings of large opportunity structures, such as the job market or the offer of direct income transference policies. International specialized literature has incorporated relational dimensions, but departing from an excessively normative vision on networks influenced by the idea of social capital. The research "Social networks, sociability and segregation" proceeds from the assumption that poverty represents a relative absence of wellbeing produced, therefore, not only by individual characteristics, but also by the difference in access to opportunities. These accesses are influenced by the connection between individuals and structures that promote wellbeing – the market, the State and everyday sociability. In this sense, poverty situations could be caused by a greater or lesser social isolation, caused by housing segregation or more or less inclusive relational patterns. Therefore, in order to better comprehend poverty and social inequalities, we need to integrate networks and segregation to the explanations of the phenomenon without departing from normative assumptions.

II. Methodology

The research studied 352 personal networks of individuals in situations of urban poverty living in 7 different locations in Sao Paulo – *Favela do Jaguaré, Favela de Paraisópolis, Favela Vila Nova Esperança (Taboão da Serra), Jardim Ângela*, tenements in central areas, *Favela Guinle (Guarulhos)* and *Cidade Tiradentes* – and 5 locations in Salvador – *Northeast of Amaralina, Favela da Paz, Curuzu, Enseada dos Cabritos* and tenements in *Pelourinho*. Besides, 30 middle class personal networks were studied in Sao Paulo so that we could have a comparative pattern. The location choices represented the diversity in housing situations and urban segregation.
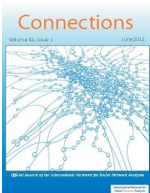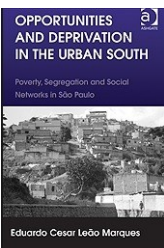
Interviews were carried during weekdays and weekends in each one of the locations, either in the streets or in the households. The interviews were ego-centered (when a given individual is asked about their own network) and consisted of two parts. In the first part a semi-structured questionnaire was applied regarding the individuals' dynamics on family, education, occupation and migration. Afterwards, a name generator tool was applied, focused on the individuals' sociability and organized by sociability spheres. The procedure was repeated in several successive rounds while new names still surfaced. At the end, some of the individuals' attributes within the network were collected.

A second stage of the research returned to 40 respondents in the two cities to investigate how they mobilized their networks in order to solve everyday problems and to access goods and services through social aid such as information regarding jobs, child and elderly care, construction, migration, social support etc.

The application of social network analysis techniques to the quantitative data, and qualitative techniques for the information obtained during the second round of interviews, represented the research's raw material.

III. Main results

On average, the networks of individuals in poverty were smaller, less varied in sociability, more local and more centered on the neighborhood than middle class networks. Beyond these average characteristics however, there was a substantial variation within each group. This variation was influenced by several individual characteristics such as age, family structure, migratory and work condition, among

others. However, the quantitative analysis allowed us to delimit different types of sociability and of networks, which varied according to the social similarity between the individual and his contacts and the larger or smaller network localism (proportion of individuals who inhabit the same neighborhood). These types turned out to be one of the elements associated to the probability of having a job, having a tenured job and being in a situation of social vulnerability, as well as having higher income. Income was associated with urban segregation, indicating that certain individuals actually manage to counterbalance the effects of social isolation produced by spatial segregation by means of varied and non-local networks.

The qualitative information indicated that such help is brought about by a combination of help cost (financial and personal mobilization) and the degrees of trust existent in the ties. These, in turn, are influenced by the frequency of contact, by the type and also by the strength of the relationships.These dynamics points towards the existence of poverty reproduction mechanisms embedded in the everyday workings of the networks, which make the networks of the poorer among the poor to be more local, and less extensive and socially varied. As a consequence, such individuals tend to have less access to goods and services, either through the market or through social help, contributing to a persistent perpetuation of poverty and inequalities.

IV. Implications towards public policies'

Since the policies for fighting poverty are based on our representations concerning the phenomenon, all these issues have important practical consequences for the State's actions. It's evident that the discussion regarding social networks in policies does not in any way mean for the replacement of traditional social policies such as education, income transference or those directed towards the job market.

That being said, the connections between social policies and networks are numerous and still underexplored. Firstly, the policy implementation could take advantage of certain types of individual networks already in place in poor communities, an action already implemented by programs such as community health agents in the family health program or in partnerships with NGOs associated to the demands in the fight against AIDS programs.

Furthermore, it would make sense to have initiatives in the fight against poverty which involves incentives towards the composition of certain network types or that fight against certain mechanisms. The research suggests that this is not simply about encouraging the constitution of associations in general, as suggested by some recent policies, since large, but local networks, based on primary associations contribute little or nothing to changes for the individuals' social situation. The only individuals who tend to benefit from merely local initiatives (and homophilic) are the practically isolated (such as the elderly), whose networks are so small that a mere amplification can bring about important effects in terms of access and social support. In general, the elements that should be encouraged are associated to a less local and less homophilic sociability, and that could engender contacts with individuals other than the ego (in several dimensions).

V. Reference Publications
Books:
MARQUES, E. 2012. *Opportunities and deprivation in the Global South: Poverty, segregation and social networks in São Paulo.* Londres: Ashgate Pub.

Articles
BICHIR, R.; MARQUES, E. Poverty and sociability in Brazilian metropolises: comparing poor people´s personal networks in São Paulo and Salvador. *Connections*, Vol. 32 (1), p. 20-32.
MARQUES, E. 2012. Social networks matter in gaining access to goods and services obtained from outside markets. *International Jourbal of Sociology*, v. 41, p. 10-27.