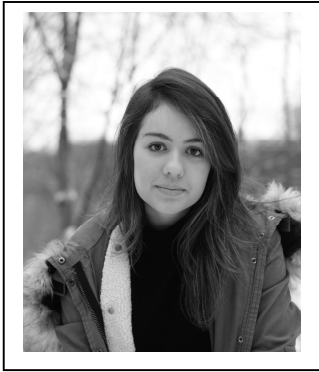# Sense of Community and Sense of Belonging

How the communities are built in Brazilian favelas and how that can be applied to social housing areas

*Heloisa Milliati Rebello*

## 1 Introduction

Low-income housing areas in Brazil are being developed as a way of taking people out from the favelas in central urban areas. Sometimes because the squatter settlements are in an important area of the city and sometimes as a consequence of social housing government programs. People are relocated and have to start a new life in a distant area, find new jobs, school for the kids but mostly, get to live in a total new neighbourhood. The sense of community that they had in favelas before no longer exist, they have to adapt their routine, social life and encounters according to what is given in the new urban area.

The aim of the paper is to characterize the development of sense of community and sense of belonging by analysing it through two different angles. The first one is about creating a community environment between people living in favelas and the second one, between people that were moved, forced or not, to a planned area. Furthermore, how the characteristics seen in the favela can be applied in new social housing areas to facilitate the development of community sense. In order to be able to evaluate a certain area as a community it is necessary to understand how to achieve such social stage, the factors that build it, how it is characterized, what are the individuals' role and to define community itself.

 To accomplish the wellbeing goes beyond having the same interests and living in the same area. For Atkinson (2007), community is designated as a shared understanding. The community is built by the people and reinforced by everyday relations, social activities, meetings in public spaces and in the streets. Therefore,

the role of architecture and urban planning is fundamental when developing low-income housing areas. It is necessary to think and give real importance for gathering and common areas on those projects and promoting an active social life of those spaces.

Moreover, discussing community goes beyond the patterns of wellbeing, favelas are part of the city and have become part of the identity of Brazil. Samba was created in the favela, funk and other types of music also. Bringing people to new housing areas need to include the provision of facilities for social development. It's also important to address the community needs when designing housing areas.

# 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 Concepts of Sense of Community and Sense of belonging

McMillan & Chavis (1986) define **sense of community** as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together." The concept of **sense of belonging** can also be associated with membership, described as a "feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong" (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Buss & Portnoy, 1967). It is a feeling of belonging, of being a part (Backman & Secord, 1959). Membership has boundaries; this means that there are people who belong and people who do not. The boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop (Bean, 1971; Ehrlich & Graeven,1971; Wood, 1971). The two senses are constantly related. To feel like you belong means that you are part of a community and that you are somehow necessary to other people. Therefore, the individual sense of belonging depends on a general sense of community.

By analysing sense of community in favelas it is notable that it has been a process through decades and what is now a community is a result of histories, important events but mostly, everyday life. On the other hand, when people are moved to a new housing area, there is no past histories, no identity. The process of becoming a social group has to start from zero and the facilities, common spaces and public spaces that help that to be built are the architects task. Dealing with low-income people means to deal with the everyday struggle of life, poverty and, in Brazil's reality, violence and drug dealers. The relations, popular performances and community activities are able to minimize those feelings and problems and create

2

refuge from desolation. When the individuals start feeling like they belong to the new housing area, that they are necessary for others in some way their sense of belonging as well as their sense of community starts to grow.

## 2.2 Samba's role in the development of Favelas in Brazil

Many articles discuss life in favela and how the identity of the place was built through time and by every dweller. *Samba- A metaphor for Rio's favelas?* (Barke, 2001) is an example of that. The paper traces the mutual development of favelas and samba from 19th century until present. Music plays a fundamental role in the construction of the identity transforming a locality into a living place and samba has done that in Rio, as an expression of *favelados* and a result of discrimination for black identity, poverty and spatial exclusion from wider society.

Samba's lyrics started mainly with protest themes, life in favela and the struggle from poverty and marginalization. From 1920's and 1930's two divergent trends in samba began to emerge: *samba de morro,* associated with black and mainly working class and reflecting their concerns. *Samba canção* is the other trend that started to take place in society and got popularized through radio with mainly sentimental themes.

## 2.3 Social gatherings, marginalization of Favelas and historic memories

*Acts of love: popular performance and community encounters in the favela* (Sneed, 2013) relates not only samba and funk to the identity of favelas, but also, any sort of activities and performances in the streets of the community. The article shows the meaning of those social encounters in the everyday life and how that affects people's life by helping to forget the problems they have to face frequently. The author describes many kind of gatherings and how community behaviors are still acted out in the way people eat and drink, tell jokes, shake hands, hug each other, and so on. Furthermore, the article characterizes the transformation of a "space" that becomes a "place" by our personal connection with it in the present moment in relation, psychologically and emotionally, to our interpersonal interactions.

Moreover, the author presents a table with two columns: the left side has feelings that would exist in a space of desolation and antagonism between people, such as control, rejection, withholding, manipulation, divergence and fear. On the right side, words that means respectively from the other column and entails acts of love, friendship and equality such as cooperation, acceptance, sharing, transparency, intimacy and love.

*The myth of marginality revisited the case of favelas in Rio de Janeiro* (Perlman, 2004) also draws upon samba in favelas, community activities, marginalization and poverty but most importantly, describes the 1970's scenario in Brazil with a dictatorship government and the ideology of need to eradicate the favelas considering them as a "social problem" and a "blight on the city". By eradicating the *favelas,* the remedy was to remove them, burn down houses and force people literally into garbage trucks, taking them to distant housing areas complexes. One of the areas was made famous by the movie *Cidade de Deus* (City of God), which also has the name of the housing area. The use of garbage trucks can also be seen as a symbolic act to remove not only the houses that are made of scraps and discarded materials, but also, the people living in them, can be relocated and discarded somewhere far. In the area of the favela, luxury condominiums were built and in the period from 1970 to 1973 over 100,000 people were forcibly removed from the favelas and taken into remote areas of the city, usually hours and costly bus rides from their work.

Images 1 and 2: Cidade de Deus, 1960.
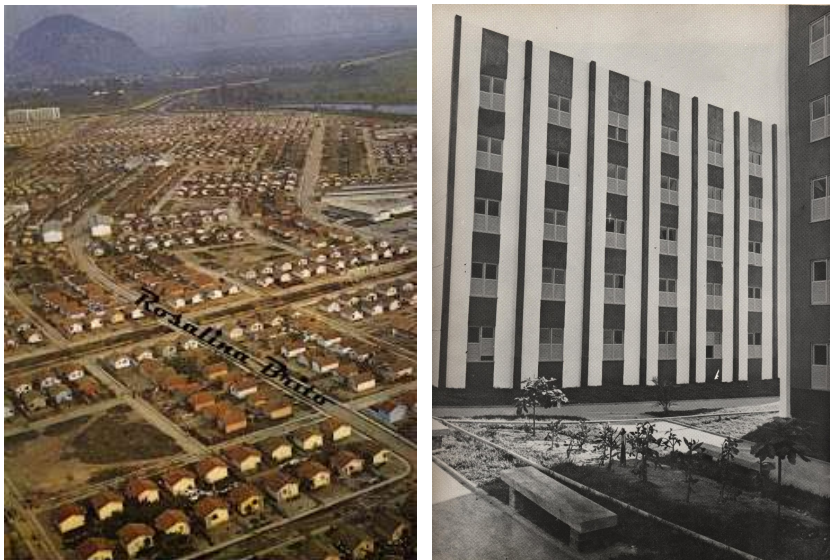


Source: Web Blog " A voz a Cidade de Deus".

Image 3: Playground in Cidade de Deus, 1960.



Source: Web Blog " A voz a Cidade de Deus".

Image 4: streets of Cidade de Deus.



Source: Web Blog " A voz a Cidade de Deus".

Perlman also discusses the marginalization and prejudice on *favelados* and envision that they are not separate from or on the margins of the system, but are tightly bound into it in a severely asymmetrical form. They contribute with their hard work, their high hopes, and their loyalties, but do not benefit from the goods and services of the system. They are not economically and politically marginal, but are exploited, manipulated, and repressed; they are not socially and culturally marginal, but stigmatized and excluded from a closed class system.

During the 1970's, the concept of marginalization of favelas became so real and concrete that was one of the reasons justifying their removal and forced relocation, as a way to "clean the city". The characteristic of favelas as a provider

of cost-free solution for the lack of affordable housing, a place that has its own identity, with united people and communities with reciprocal favors and always opened to receive new dwellers and consequently mitigate the hardship of migrants and their families was not valid during the 1970's and was annulled by these policies.

*Memórias, histórias e representações sociais do bairro de Vila Isabel e de uma de suas favelas* (Piccolo, 2009) and *Halbwacks: Memória Coletiva e experiência* (Sandoval, 1993) are two other articles that relate the existence of the community and its identity to the collective memory and history. The discussion on both of them show the importance of the memory of events as symbolic expression of the individuals and groups by giving visibility to social relations, reinforce sense of belonging and create social network. The creation of the identity is created by those official and non-official memories and histories and are able to guide the everyday life of people living in those areas nowadays by imposing their culture and practices.

# 3. Community and belonging in Favelas and social housing areas

### 3.1 The importance of facilities, common spaces and public spaces

The design of new planned areas and the spaces and functions that are created by the architects are fundamental for facilitating or limiting social interactions, spontaneous gatherings, events and the first steps towards community. The example of *Rethinking community and public space from the margins: a study of community libraries in Bangalore's slums* (Pyati, 2012) shows another reality in slums and sense of community that could be applied for Brazil in some cases. In India, people from different places, countries, with different religions and habits cohabit in slums. The NGOs were responsible for improving the life of the area through creating forums and meetings in the new library. People felt more free to talk about their problems and to discuss actions for the slum. Parents have also seen the meetings as a time of social interaction and were motivated to attend the library and its forums since it offered a temporary respite from domestic duties. Besides, the group participants also commented that they felt more safe with their kids in the library and not in the streets where they previously spent their time after school. Furthermore, the librarians and NGOs staff were also able to control

the attendance of the students in the library and that was a good way to know if something was wrong with the kid or at home.

Such projects are able to start some notion of community and provide vital monitoring and reassert a public facility for marginalized communities. The research of the impacts that those projects have in the areas where they are implemented should continue and most importantly, as a good solution for slums in other countries and new ideas for NGOs and governments everywhere. Although the favelas in Brazil usually gather people with the same background, habits and places, the latter could be applied to another reality in Brazil: when people from different places are relocated to a new planned area and have to start a new life. The facilities offered could have a big impact on how that area will be developed as a unity and providing spaces and activities that generate interaction is the key to get people together.

## 3.2 Public spaces, social gatherings and participatory process

Samba was an important way for Favelas to become part of the city context. Carnival schools have favelas name where they were created, they are now responsible for the biggest event of Brazil and the organization happens inside the favelas. The costumes, song lyrics, training, the themes and dances of the festival are coordinated by the community. The favelas have made their way into the recognition of the city and the dwellers have important role in that.

It is important to recognize that samba was created by favela dwellers, in social encounters as an entertainment for people. The streets and open areas in favelas were samba's first stage "…up on the *morros*, or hills, in the favelas where many of the poor people lived, the samba … survived and continued its own evolution" (McGowan and Pessanha, 1991, p 35).

Public spaces and streets are the instrument of dialogue between neighbors, where they occasionally meet, talk, create a social network, it's the stage of dances, games, songs, sports and festivals. Public and Informal: Open Space for the Urban Poor (Hersh,2013) suggest that including public spaces in the design of urban policies and programs can act as a catalyst for slum upgrading in developing countries. Hence, it is also argued that design and planning of public spaces in slums help address city management issues, and contribute to community development and an improved quality of life. Giving importance to these types of areas in a new planned area for social housing is one of the first steps for people to recognize the new place as a potential area for creating a new

life and facilitating the social interaction between the new neighborhood can contribute for the creation of the community sense.

Image 4: Soccer fields in Brazilian favelas.



Source: Racismo Ambiental.

Image 5: *Capoeira* dancing and sporting in favela.



Source: Patrick Donohue Flickr.

Image 6: Samba and meetings in *Santa Marta* Favela.



Source: Rio de Janeiro Government website.

 The "The Global Compact" shows the concept of participatory design as a "collaboration between stakeholders such as community, government, businesses and professionals where all actively take part in the design process of a specific project. This design approach gives people the acknowledgement for their inputs and final design assures to meet the main users' needs."

Creating these forums and dialoguing with the future dwellers of the planned area is an important way of getting to know their needs, interact with them and also, make them interact with each other, allowing them to know themselves and start this new social interaction. Furthermore, the fact that they can contribute to the development of the new housing area is important in the way of letting them feel like they belong there and that they were necessary when thinking about the place where they will live.

The new Brazilian housing policy and the urban planning practice: The Local Housing Plan (PLHIS) exemplifies the new attempts on the participatory process: "The necessary and traditional activity of listening to the community, considering its opinion as an input as relevant or more than the eminently technical ones – but also through the establishment of formal instances of opinion, deliberation and co-management of the municipality housing policy."

**3.3 Table 1: Analysis between favelas and new social housing areas**
**Source: Elaborated by the author**

|  | Consolidated Favela | New Social Housing Area |
|---|---|---|
| Social Activities | The meetings, encounters and gatherings are common on the everyday life of favela's residents. The street is the platform of interaction and where everything happens: from "*rodas de samba*", "*baile funk*", church rituals until spontaneous door meetings. | The meetings and encounters are still incipient and, depending on each case, people are still uncomfortable with the neighbors. In many cases, being forced out to somewhere else affects negatively on people's mood and casual conversations. |
| Role in the city | Ahlbrant and Cunningham (1979) viewed sense of community as an important contribution to one's commitment to a neighborhood. The favela dwellers show this commitment and satisfaction with the community by being even more loyal to the favela than to the rest of the city. That is observed in the elections of their representatives, politicians and also, song lyrics expressing their willing to make the favela bigger and recognized as part of the city. | The "The Guardian" journal shows the disappointment of relocated people and how they see themselves as not important and as an obstacle to the city. Big events such as World Cup and Olympic games have resulted until now in a relocation of more than 13.000 thousand people. They are separated from the neighbors and are now distant from the city center and their jobs, school and facilities. The sense of unity is lost and they are now single pieces in the social housing area. |
| Sense of Community and sense of belonging | As described by Aronson & Mills, the sense of belonging is associated to when one gives a part of oneself and therefore has a right to belong. That does not depend on external factors and on the existence of the sense of community. Each dweller has their own sense of belonging or not to the favela. The community in the favelas are a reality and have been developed since the 1920's. | Through the previous design of the planned area it can be easier or not to develop the sense of community and belonging. Participatory processes, creation of public spaces and facilities in the area are important instruments for people to feel part of the new area. The sense of community and belonging are good factors on analyzing the success of social housing design in Brazil. |

# 5 The Role of Architects

The Architect's role is related to the contribution to the development of sense of belonging and sense of community and connected to the design process of housing areas and favelas' transformations.

In Favelas' case, since the area is mostly consolidated, the architect has important impact when it comes to small but effective changes, a new plaza, sports centre, workshop area.

For the new social housing areas, the architect has big impact since the first decisions. The choice of the new site is important in order to guarantee the livelihoods between dwellers and city context. The transportation within should be facilitated, carefully thought and included as part of the design process. The participation of the new dwellers in meetings and forums is essential for the realization of the project not only in building level but city and community level. The future dwellers should be a part of the process of the housing area design and be part of the decision making. The public spaces should be thought and presented to the dwellers, the facilities in the area should be according to the needs of the users.

Lastly, the architect should be seen and should work as the instrument of enabling a better use of housing areas and favelas and the responsible for better quality of life.

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