

Crafting Civil Society: An Investigation of Contested Organising Spaces in Favelas

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Resumo:

Organizações de sociedade civil são frequentemente definidas a partir de uma problemática separação entre Sociedade Civil e outras esferas da vida (como Mercado e Estado). Essa alienação decorre de uma de-espacialização das organizações, que existem na prática inseridos em contextos sócio-espaciais. Esse artigo busca incorporar a categoria de espaço na análise das Organizações de Sociedade Civil (OSC) para entender como são afetadas essas organizações pelos processos de produção espacial de um território. Para isso, irei apresentar o caso das OSCs em favelas brasileiras, visando demonstrar como as organizações determinam e são determinadas dialeticamente pelo espaço social que habitam. O quadro analítico utilizado para compreender estas organizações, inspirado principalmente em Lefebvre, é baseado em dois pressupostos importantes: i) as organizações da sociedade civil não podem ser separadas de seu espaço social; e ii) organizações da sociedade civil adquirem materialidade por meio de experiências temporais de produção de espaço. A partir desses dois pressupostos, a geração de dados consistiu em uma observação participante realizada em uma favela do Rio de Janeiro. Durante dez semanas, entrevistei, observei e trabalhei com membros de várias organizações nesta favela, na sua maioria residentes.

Palavras-chave: *espaço, favelas, sociedade civil*

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1. Introduction

In Rio, favelas house more than 22% of the city population, and can be seen from most parts of the city (IBGE, 2011). Favelas are strongly marked by informality in work relations and local trades, which makes them also prolific spaces for alternative organisation and ingenious solutions. Their population – which is majorly black and has much lower literacy rate compared to the city average – also thrives in cultural activities. In one of these favelas (Mucuripe), located in a wealthy zone of the city, a group of entrepreneur craftspeople had decided to set up a permanent collective of local producers in Favela Mucuripe. They then started organising a party to celebrate the beginning of their activities and gather the support of the local community.

However, the only hall available for that kind of festival (samba court) was controlled by a relative of a local drug baron. Despite majorly inhabited by workers of the formal city, favela territories are often also the base for urban gangs and drug dealers – a consequence of the historical absence of State – which reinforce their domination with money and weapons. When they tried to book the court, this controller said that that was a good idea and proposed an association to fund the party in full. The organisation was then put in an ethical dilemma, should they accept the offer, knowing the money had come from activities of drug trafficking? Would this association lead to future commitments with drug dealers, to which they would be dragged into against their will?

The first weeks of existence of MarketersOrg were spent trying to define the limits of the organisation. Each choice about topics such as funding, membership and responsibilities represented an imaginary line drawn that included some places and individuals and excluded others. That was a process of negotiating their freedom against different places that were imposed to the territory, and a pledge for their own intentions for the favela. It involved also the mediation of the means to produce space, and the relation between the organisation and the territory. These choices became material as the events happened and realised the imagined space, such as in the decision about whether they should accept this collaboration with drug dealers and boost the potential of the organisation to dominate space, or avoid this relationship and maintain their autonomy to focus in the appropriation of their needs with

their own means. They eventually decided not to accept the partnership, and gave up on the party.

The process of drawing borders for the creation of the organisational identity is a constant negotiation with the surrounding environment, which is never completely resolved. That is because every organisation exists spatially, and it absorbs from space its conditions. I propose in this paper to incorporate space to the analysis of civil society organisations, and challenge the neopositivist separation of theory and method that still undermines the potential of qualitative research in management (Jack & Westwood, 2006). The spatial turn observed in the field of organisation studies in the past decades led to an increasing production on space and organisations that respond to calls produced by breaking works in the area (Baldry, 1999; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Kornberger & Clegg, 2003, 2004). However, almost all the empirical investigations can be roughly divided in researches in/about the workplace or transient organising. In this field, the attention to the *political economy of space* (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 104) has been surprisingly scarce. I will expand here the application of Lefebvre's concepts regarding the *Production of Space* in the analysis of Civil Society Organisations (henceforth, CSOs).

In this paper, I aim to demonstrate the importance of incorporating the analysis of socio-geographic space to understanding the CSOs that operate in a given territory. I will present the case of CSOs in favelas (Brazilian slums) to demonstrate how organisations dialectically determine and are determined by their inhabited social space. The analytical frame used to access these organisations is based on two important assumptions: i) civil society organisations cannot be separated from their surrounding space; and ii) civil society organisations acquire materiality by means of temporal experiences of producing space. Based on these two assumptions, the generation of data consisted of participatory observation performed in a favela I was already familiar with. During ten weeks, I interviewed, observed and worked with members of various organisations in this favela, mostly residents. The methodological and theoretical framework used in this paper contributes to rescuing the importance of the spatiality of civil society, which is alienated in the production of ideologies that support the social production of the abstract space of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991).

2. Intermingling Civil Society: what kind of organisations?

The reinforcement of civil society as a separate sphere where the vices of both the market and the state could be overcome is an ideological project. The relative success for this emergence is related to the project of rolling back states as the main providers of social goods and put into its place a group of practices of civil society that is governed by the same logics of the market (Chandhoke, 2002). These differences in stance are portrayed by Lewis (2014) as the opposition of a *liberal view* of civil society – which emphasizes the civic responsibility and public virtue of a civic arena that acts in partnership for development strengthening democracy – and what Lewis calls the *radical view*, which explores negotiation and conflict in the struggles of power in civil society. The radical view of civil society unfolds from the observation of its empirical challenges and disputes, rather than the imposition of ideological isolation.

[...] rather than harmony there is an emphasis on negotiation and conflict based on struggles for power, and on blurred boundaries with the state. This view better acknowledges the reality that civil society contains many different competing ideas and interests, not all of which contribute positively to development. (Lewis, 2014, p. 66)

As Lewis highlights, this approach represents civil society less as an actor and more as a site of struggles between hegemonic and non-hegemonic forces, or a context in which a wide range of collectivities interact (Lewis, 2014, p. 71). Instead of the liberal view of civil society organisations as normative agents focused on service delivery, the analysis based on this perspective emphasises that any kind of collective organisation and demonstration participates in the arena of competing interests that produce space, and hence civil society organisations become central for the attainment of power and enabling the structures of consumption.

The radical view opens the possibility to critique from a different angle important issues discussed in the field of Third Sector Research, resulting from the overlapping of different spheres such as the Market and Volunteer Sector. The intermingling of logics in the same organisational identity has been recently acknowledged by researchers of non-profit organisations for example with the emergence of research on ‘partnerships’ (Contu & Girei, 2014; Mercer, 2003; Peci, Figale, & Sobral, 2011) and ‘organisational hybridity’ (Anheier & Krlev, 2014; Dar, 2014; Henriksen, Smith, & Zimmer, 2015). The recent agenda on third sector and civil society organisations is largely focused thus on how organisations adjust to a changing environment increasingly dominated by the logic of the market, which deeply affects their governance mechanisms (see, *inter alia*, Henriksen et al., 2015).

Although this has been indeed the case in the fields of organisation studies and third sector research, this agenda is still largely underpinned by the assumption that such organisations are involved in service delivery for the community, which is funded by private donors or subcontracted from the state, following the logic of modern management. This relation is scrutinized and criticized in Dar and Cooke (2008), who analyse various discourses of domination led by powerful elites and institutions. The authors show that contemporary times see a particular step of commitment with the neoliberal agenda, in which the boundaries between development and management are more blurred, enforced by the extension of the ‘development management’ to non-state domains. This critique resounds what was put forward by Chandhoke (2002, 2007, 2012) who argued that such an understanding of third sector organisations fits well with a certain imaginary of civil society aligned with the neoliberal agenda, but which is considerably narrow for a critical analysis.

Therefore, I will approach civil society from a radical view, and see CSOs as mediators of interests that are pursued in connection to the territory of favelas and to the total space of society. As I will argue, observing organisations spatially enables me to connect them to their territory and also to the other social relations that affect their organisational actions.

3. The contributions of space for organisation studies

Existing literature on space

The process of drawing boundaries in academic fields is a fluid proposition, and should account border zones instead of border lines – to use a spatial terminology inspired by the territorial nature of knowledge boundaries in organisation studies (Hughes, 2013). I purport to identify here two aspects of mutual influence in the works that apply the concept of space to organisations, and which will be explained below: the common interest in spatial aspects of power and control, and the interrogation of the boundaries of organisations.

An important aspect of the literature of space and organisation is the use of this framework to scrutinize issues of power and control. Space is imbued with power relations in that the social production of space requires the exercise of power, and in the analysis of space, elements of individual control and resistance are often revealed. The use of spatial frameworks can be particularly useful in understanding, for example, how the design of workspaces results in many implications of control for its users/workers (Dale, 2005; Panayiotou & Kafiris, 2011; Wapshott & Mallett, 2012) or how the construction and demarcation of spaces is also a

process of privileging certain places and excluding others (Fahy, Easterby-Smith, & Lervik, 2014; Hancock & Spicer, 2011).

Almost all the literature relating space to issues of power and control is limited to the examination of the workplace and commodified work relations. In effect, most works still focus on the building and the architectural forms of organisation, which continues to be nonetheless a highly overlooked aspect of the mainstream of organisation studies (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1435). However, there are other types of relations involving organisations that realize similar processes of production of space, and are also implicated in the construction of social space. In that regard, another group of studies on space examined alternative forms of organisation and discussed the issue of organisational boundaries, although largely overlooking issues of power.

Exploring aspects of organisational boundaries is another strong contribution of the application of space in organisational analysis. Boundaries can be defined – or rather enacted – in the various dimensions of social life, such as the boundaries of material access, the limits of organisational norms, the restraints on mobility, or the organisational influence on private life (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013; Ford & Harding, 2004; Loacker & Sliwa, 2015). Current studies on organisational boundaries are largely dominated by the perspective of space as a processual activity (hence, ‘spacing’), which has been popular in organisation studies in the past years. These approaches advocate the understanding of space as necessarily bound by lived experience, through embodied actions. This standpoint rejects contrasting views of space on the grounds that they would be considered ‘representational’ of a static space, and advocates instead the adoption of a “performatic” realization of space (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Jones, McLean, & Quattrone, 2004; Lindberg & Czarniawska, 2006). Despite the inspiring empirical accounts for the comprehension of an embodied space, such investigations could easily underestimate the importance of power on the determination of social materiality, and while they focus on the transience of organisations, they limit the understanding of the longstanding nature and implications of its practices.

Incorporating Henri Lefebvre to CSOs

In this paper, I am particularly interested in how civil society organisations exist beyond their workplace, and how the actions of these organisations that are shaped by social relations on various levels produce longstanding effects in their organising space. Hence, I will explore

the *political economy of the 'organisation of space'* (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 142), which concerns the production of space observed through political and economic processes of organisation as discussed by Henri Lefebvre (1991). The 'organisation of space' conveys, thus, the relationships amongst different organisations. This focus will allow me to expand the contributions that the literature of space can give to the analysis of CSOs, by looking at the relations between organisations and exploring the structural relations of society manifested in the organised actions of civil society. In order to do that, my point of departure is the theory of Henri Lefebvre, and his perspective of the social production of space, which has been largely appropriated in organisation studies, although with a different focus from my own.

Lefebvre (1991) rejected the idea of space as a simply entity occupied by physical things detached from social relations. He adopted the concept of 'social space' referring to a constructed space, hence a social product, and highlighted that every society produces its own space. In addition, by shifting the focus of analysis from the things 'in' space to space itself, Lefebvre provides a critical analysis of how space is both a social product and also the means for the reproduction of history. Therefore, because social space incorporates social actions, it encompasses also the social relations of production. On this basis Lefebvre discussed every social relation of reproduction as linked to the entirety of space. The 'relational thinking' adopted by Lefebvre and many other authors theorising on space is described by David Harvey as follows: "An event or a thing at a point in space cannot be understood by appeal to what exists only at that point. It depends upon everything else going on around it" (Harvey, 2008, p. 274).

The production of the abstract space of capitalism is one of the main messages in Lefebvre's work. This process finds in urban space its main setting, where the reproduction of social life is highly dependent on the commodification of space. In effect, the observation of how the 'conceived space' becomes fetishized in modernity over the other spatial dimensions (lived and perceived spaces) and instrumentally applied for the social reproduction coincides with the change in productive activity becoming no longer directed toward the perpetuation of social life, but centred on the reproduction of its abstract space.

abstract space took over from historical space, which nevertheless lived on, though gradually losing its force, as substratum or underpinning of representational spaces. [...] The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it

dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 49)

In that sense, Lefebvre's abstract space should not be dismissed as simply the space that results from capitalism, for it is in how Lefebvre theorises abstraction that important aspects of how capital conceals symbolic and direct forms of violence become apparent. Although it proceeds from abstraction, in the history of capital accumulation the abstract space realised the domination of material space, which was mediated by the appearance of the urban space.

4. Research Methods: the case of Mucuripe

Favelas in Rio cover hills and mountains, and the construction of houses doesn't follow any planned landmark. Ingenuous low cost building solutions enable the expansion of the built area to house relatives. As a result, the high density of occupation lead to intense social relations and winding pathways and roadways emerge from an adventitious design, preventing the circulation of cars in most of the territory. Within this complicated geography, drug dealers found for decades a perfect hideout for their illegal trade. Since 2009, state programs have been involved in an attempt to integrate these territories to the institutional life of city (for critical analyses of the kind of integration that is aimed see Barbosa, 2012; Fleury, 2012; Lacerda, 2016). The Pacification Police Units program (UPP = Unidades de Policia Pacificadora) consists of a two-staged occupation process implemented in each favela chosen to be 'pacified', which means the military occupation of the territory followed by the consolidation of control by the State.

However, this process is still non hegemonic, and favelas are thus produced by the conformation of power struggles involving drug dealers, the increasing influence of the market, and the military and civil presence of the state. The array of influences competing the regulation of these territories has a direct influence in the everyday of CSOs. In order to reveal the main influences in the organising space of civil society, this article will examine the dialectical relation that exists in the mutual production of organisations and the territories of favelas. This discussion will be advanced with empirical data generated in my fieldwork in one of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

This research is included in the domain of critical management studies and hence embraces a reflexive methodology. This is a qualitative research intended to explore in-depth the organising space of CSOs, and for that adopts a participatory approach. It is a case study

which draws some inspiration from ethnography and action research, in that it is based on data generated collaboratively during the engagement with the work and social reality of individuals in the field. It focuses in a favela, which I call here *Mucuripe*, located in the hillside of Rio, as are the vast majority of the other favelas of the city. According the 2010 census, the territory houses 10,000 dwellers divided in two main communities: Buruti and Itaperi.

I had contributed with one of the organisations operating at Buruti for many years, and cultivated accesses to perform the fieldwork, which was ethno-methodologically informed through participatory observation and interviews. The main data collection took place during 10 weeks, during which I worked in two organisations, performing activities, attending their meetings, and interviewing people involved to related practices and events. During this process, I interacted with many other organisations which were part of overlapping networks and operated in the same territory.

5. Illustrative case and preliminary findings

The new influence exercised by the state and the police after the pacification did not overcome the power of drug dealers, even though it opened space for a higher presence of the market services and products. The maintenance of the power of drug dealers finds support in the respect individuals and organisations still held for their presence, and in these actions the influence of this disputed space for the work of CSOs becomes visible. While I was working there, one of my co-workers said he needed to let “the guys” (drug dealers) know before starting a project that they planned to do in the favela, filming the territory with an outsider partner. This was predominantly led by the fear he had for the safety of the outsiders that would enter to film the favela under his responsibility. In addition, episodes of ‘trials’ conducted by the parallel drug court still happened, even years after the pacification. In one of the events which I followed closely, the separation of an organisation ended in physical confrontation and was mediated by a drug dealers’ trial.

After recurrent fights between the members of a social project for recycling (Luiz against Arouca and Vava), personal disputes between them escalated to more serious accusations. Eventually, after a physical confrontation, Luiz appealed for the police to intervene, but the police refused to get involved. After that, working materials from another CSO disappeared from the same building where they used to operate, and when inquired about that, they

exchanged accusations. The robbed organisation had links with drug dealers from another favela, which sent this message: if the local traffickers didn't solve the issue, they would invade Mucuripe and settle it themselves. The three involved members were called before an audience with the drug boss, who told them something similar to the following: "haven't you been working together for eight months? Only now you've realized you don't get along? Why is it coming to me something you should have sorted yourselves?" The drug chief also warned against talking to the police first, threatening to proceed differently if that happened again. The lost material was later returned and the organisation split into two¹.

This event illustrates the power in practice and symbolic influence that continues to be represented by drug dealers, which nonetheless is not the only authority. This overlapping of different flows of space production, and the corresponding effect on organisations, can be better comprehended with the view of the territory as composed of multiple territorialities, rather than a single and homogeneous territory. Such analysis starts with the main issue of the pacification: even after the implementation of UPP, drug dealers were still active. In effect, the spatial occupation of the police remained focused on ending violent confrontation, but left many gaps for the continued operation of trafficking. This contradiction is to some extent part of the contradictory formation of any territory, in which there are always dialectic functions of prohibition and transgression, interdiction and violation, norms and failure (Raffestin, 2012), but in the context of favelas it was certainly leveraged by the controversial attempt to produce the abstract space.

Therefore, because of the overlapping territorialities of Mucuripe described so far we cannot speak of a single dominant space with a single culturally sanctioned set of norms in the favela. The uncompleted transition from a historical space to a new abstract space leaves Mucuripe in a state 'in-between' the old and a new structure. On the one side, favelas evolved over time from spaces of precarious settlement where the patterns of occupation crafted singular social spaces, to which drug dealers were already incorporated. On the other side, the state attempted to impose external frameworks through the production of its abstract space. My observation happened in a moment when this clash was still unresolved and manifested as an apparent spatial contradiction.

¹ Despite the apparent softer stance in the boss' verdict, the narrative of this trial conveyed a great relief that it didn't finish in a more violent way.

6. Concluding remarks

This paper assesses the effect of the political economy of the urban space (or what Lefebvre calls the social production of space) in the organisation of civil society in favelas. It reveals how the political economy influences the organisation of the space of civil society. This analysis is significant in comprehending what influences the organisation of space of CSOs based in favelas beyond the limits of their workplace, because it highlights how the organising space of favelas can only be explained by the analysis of the totality of space, in which the whole explains its parts (Santos, 2006, p. 74), beyond specific organisational places.

Favelas are particularly appropriate spaces for the analysis of the production of space because the recent attempt to 'pacify' them shows good examples of the fetishization of space in the service of the state for the creation of the abstract space. Ongoing processes of commodification and bureaucratization of everyday life can be related to what pointed out by Lefebvre as important elements of how abstract space takes over from historical space. The historical process of construction of the territory of Mucuripe results from the layering of historical social spaces with elements of past divisions of labour such as the concentration of cheap labour in the favelas in precarious buildings. Recent violent transformations of the territory, namely the program of 'pacification', produce conflicting processes of territorialisation. As a result, the norms that guide the production of space are disputed and contradictory, denying important features of the historical space of the favela. This can be considered a late integration of the favelas in the space of capital accumulation (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 49).

But the dissolution of the old relations, which should be engendered by the abstract space, did not occur at Mucuripe, as demonstrated by the strong influence drug dealers still exert. In this context, the favela of Mucuripe was riddled with contradictions and I argued that seeing this space as formed of overlapping territorialities helped understanding the tensions CSOs were subjected to. In events that illustrated the simultaneous and conflicting influence exerted by drug dealers, the state, and the police in CSOs, I portray favelas as contested spaces, at the boundary of dominant spaces and not fully part of any of them. So the rules in favelas have more fluid and uncertain origins, but whatever they are they affect every organisation. CSOs operate in the territory in a highly complex regulatory space, in which transformation happens by means of sanction and violation, and respond to this context accordingly in each event.

7. References

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