

5.4. The theatre in the places of social exclusion: preliminary analysis of the *Pele - Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural* association activities

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Abstract

This paper is based on a case study still in progress that aims to analyse how civil society actions can provide alternatives for social exclusion and segregation. Besides that, we hope to understand whether and how these actions can be a support for the community, generating solidarity and enhancing democratic participation. Our case study is about an association who acts in the urban area of Porto, since 2007, and bets in the theatre as a privileged space for dialogue and collective creation that increase community development and promote social and territorial cohesion. Therefore, as part of the investigation, it fits our proposal in this paper to execute a preliminary analysis of the projects and activities developed by *Pele - Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural* association. These activities involve different groups that face social exclusion. Thus, we are proposing a diachronic view of the eight years of *Pele's* existence.

Keywords: urban social exclusion, theatre, Porto, *Pele - Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural* Association.

Introduction

This paper is part of a PhD project, with a mainly qualitative approach, that aims to understand the importance of socio-cultural proximity relations and social cohesion in the urban sphere. It is a work-in-progress based on the presentation made at the KISMIF International Conference 2015 that happened on July, in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto, Portugal.

From the case study of *Pele - Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural* association (from now on referred to only as *Pele*), who acts on Porto, Portugal, our project propose to understand how the spaces of action and collective participation generates new local networks that provide inclusion, connection, solidarity, feelings of belonging and proximity in spaces of social exclusion. Through the case study, inserted in the territorial, social, economic and political context, we search the understanding of how and in which way the use of artistic and cultural procedures can be considered forms of revitalization of the democratic participation, creating new local social networks.

The scientific disquiet was narrowed during the investigation and developed from three thematic axes, central to the initial delimitation of the object of study: the social exclusion, the civil society actions and the territory. Social exclusion as a multidimensional situation, that develops in a vulnerability process with economic, political, cultural and social dimensions (Castel, 2009; Paugam, 1996). Despite of being a disputed term in many aspects, we still believe in its importance for focusing on the processual, multidimensional and relational feature that ended up favouring an integrative look that compass the complexity of social phenomenon, particularly relevant in the current society.

Civil society actions as a new possibility to answer to contemporary challenges (Nunes, 2013) and, at the moment, with new relevance as the Welfare State decrease. In the reflexive modernity described by Beck (2000), where endemic uncertainty is what characterizes the life and basic existence for the majority of people, including the middle class apparently accommodated, the voluntary organizations play an important role in the construction of a global civil society, contributing to generate the public meaning and the public trust.

The territory is considered as an urban context where there is territorial exclusions and stigmatization (Wacquant, 2010). In the Wacquant perspective (1997, 2010), the metropolitan core deteriorates faster and the labour districts witness a deterioration of the social conditions. The context of advanced marginalization helps to develop new ways of social enclosure promoted by an unequal transformation of the more advanced western economic societies.

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In our case, the territory is the city of Porto, specifically the metropolitan area that includes seventeen municipalities. Our case study is located in marginalized territory characterized by situations of economic and social deprivation.

This work is a preliminary documental analysis of projects and activities of the *Pele* association and we propose a diachronic view of the eight years of its history. In this preliminary phase, the documental analysis was made through the study of audio-visual and texts extracts from the association's website (www.apele.org), from pamphlets and others sources collected during this phase of observation. We also followed the updates from their Facebook profile. The documental analysis helped us to understand the nature of the group and their activities, identifying the typology of their projects, the connection with the territory and the degree of institutionalization.

The case study

The sociological discussion about the social exclusion as a process that involves a multiple population segments (Castel, 2009) became central in the context of new risks and contemporary challenges (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991). In view of the problems that pervade our society, it seems necessary to advance in the knowledge about these questions and their dynamics to provide a better understanding that could lead to transformation and change and boost the eradication of problematic situations (Estivill, 2003). The social exclusion becomes a determining factor to explain the problems of society (Paugam, 1996). As a transversal, multi-dimensional and processual notion, it allows to investigate the vulnerabilities and risks of modern societies. It helps in the interpretation of the labour market challenges, in the weakening of social ties and in the assertion of new risks of marginalization with an integrative look.

Another debate that seems to acquire new centrality is the importance that collective actions of civil society gained at strategic levels in financial crisis context and political legitimization of the Welfare State (Santos, 1999). This is especially relevant in the continental or corporative model (Esping-Andersen, 1994); in the South European model (Silva, 2002); in the crisis of classic institutions once responsible to assist families and local communities; in the individualization and society fragmentation (Giddens, 1991); in the increase of distrust and fear of one another (Bauman, 2006); and in the increase of inequality in the south of Europe (Pordata, s/d). With the desegregation of the social bounds at territorial levels, it is necessary to rethink the "mediator institutions" (Lamphere, 1992 *apud* Wacquant, 1997, p. 138) that can have a central role in the positive dynamics of the territories that lacks unifying strengths between people who experienced the same marginality condition: "(...) it needs to be invented [mediator institutions] to promote once more solidarity in the city and to produce social integration previously originated by the incorporation of a class or compact ethnoracial community" (Wacquant, 1997, p.138). Holding these questions in mind, we started our investigation about the *Pele* association.

Pele association, who works in the urban area of Porto since 2007, invested in the theatre, and in the Theatre of the Oppressed, as a privileged space for dialogue and collective creation, which can contribute to the development of the community and promote social and territorial cohesion (Pele, s/d). This case study was selected from an exploratory phase of research conducted in the Porto Council between March and June of 2014. We used a snowball methodology of interviews that started with six privileged informants. During this process we have done eleven interviews and made a list with sixty-two groups, such as associations, social movements and cultural spaces.

In this first moment of negotiation and access to the field, we aimed to get to know the territory and to identify the existent associations that developed projects with and in favour of the population who lives in socially and economically deprived neighborhoods, through systematic and permanent actions. Once the information was retrieved by means of individual semi-structured interviews with privileged informants, we identified the relevant features in relation to the starting point and the goals of this project. The interviews aimed also to the narrowing of a relation and building of trust between the researcher and others actors, approximation to the field of study, fundamental to the ethnographic research *in loco*.

For each association we have made an identity card with the following points: the mission, the kind of organization, the kind of activities, the history, the local (head office, the use of public spaces), the participants profile, the relationship with other groups (the network) and the kind of job that the association developed².

² According to the central thematic promoted by groups, we have identified seven different spheres of action: education, culture, environment, homeless, gender, politics and housing.

The methodological strategy of this case study is to provide accurate and deep analyses of a social phenomenon, taking in consideration the context and, at the same time, to highlight and wonder its specificities (Yin, 2009). We have chosen the case study following a parameter that would match with our goals. So, we tried to find an association that worked with people in a situation of social exclusion and in a marginalized territory, with a specific space connotation and place stigmatization (Wacquant, 2010). At the same time, it was important to find an association that had worked continuously for more than five years, in order to allow an analysis about long-term projects and with the chance to observe their impacts through the participant experience. So, we looked for an association with a territorial connection and with frequent activities in Porto in the last five years and that had a real possibility to maintain their activities in the near future.

In the ethnographic studies, in which we are inserted, the main technique is the participant observation, but it is worth stating that another central element to the qualitative research is the methodological triangulation, i.e., the combination of different strategies that includes documentation and statistical sources with more classic techniques (Valles, 2007). Our preliminary analysis is framed in this scenario of documental research about the association.

A diachronic analysis of Pele – *Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural* activities

According to Sá-Silva, Adams & Guindani (2009), the documentary research is characterized by the search for information on sources who received no scientific treatment, for instance reports, newspaper articles, magazines, letters, recordings, photographs. To learn more about the *Pele* association we analysed the documents produced about them and their activities that are published in their own website. In this sense, we performed a diachronic analysis of the association's activities through the images, videos, synopses and text information about their developed projects available in the website (Pele s/d). In addition to the website, we analysed the material collected at the place of their public presentations as pamphlets and programs. The analysis of these secondary sources helped in the understanding of the nature of the association and of the dynamics that *Pele* intertwines with other institutions and the relationships between the group and the territory.

The specific nature of the association, who assumes the artistic creation and the theatre as a lever to work the issue of social and territorial cohesion, also introduces the discussion on the use of artistic and cultural practices as ways of revitalizing democratic participation, intervention in the public spaces and the fight against social exclusion (Pinto, 1995). This is an interesting starting point to understand possible ways of emancipatory change, disruption of social reproduction mechanisms besides understanding their implementation difficulties (Azevedo, 2012). This discussion fits into the line of thinking that articulates the cultural instances with other social issues (Borges, Costa, & Graça, 2014) as urban regeneration, social inclusion and democratization, boosting the socio-economic development and the well-being also with the contribution of artistic and cultural elements. In our case, the theatre is interpreted as having a strong social and political implication in the development of the community (Bezelga, 2015) with impacts on community networks, where theatricality becomes a permanent research object and a way of questioning the dominant views. Through experimentation, the shared and collective process of artistic creation promotes the capacity of self-reflection and can foster new spaces for meeting, socialization and mobilization (Cruz, 2015) so important to the scenario described on contemporary societies. In the case of socially stigmatized places, cultural intervention may trigger virtuous processes of identity repair, which generally are aimed at combating social exclusion (Pinto, 1995). In the case of places affected by persistent processes of segregation and stigmatization, Pinto (1995) proposes a sociocultural change from the creation of new socialization contexts that may cause "biographical shocks" to produce new social relations. Therefore, it is essential to promote the work developed from and with the territory, aiming at an active participation of people in a perspective of autonomy and continuity of groups.

The theatre, more specifically the community theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed, can be considered a tool that allows us to examine the social reality and the possibilities of social change. The theatre helps to achieve change by trying out new roles and situations and by helping the social actor to better understand oneself and the surrounding context. For Augusto Boal (1931-2009), the Theatre of the Oppressed can provide, through research of social options to the limits of the imaginable, an essay that examine the possible alternatives and encourages the "spect-actor" to change (Boal, 1975).

We present here a diachronic view of the activities undertaken by the association (table 1). This association establishes as specific practice areas the following: (1) projects in prisons; (2) projects with communities (Community Theatre); (3) theatre projects developed in partnership with the Porto Deaf Association (*Associação de Surdos do Porto* - ASP); (4) and projects in the scope of training and Theatre of the Oppressed. In all projects, the artistic activities and mostly the theatre are the tools that are taken to achieve aims of a social nature, "assuming the artistic creation as a tool for community, social and economic development, contributing to social and territorial cohesion" (Pele, s/d). Across the five specific practice areas, we identified five international partnerships that have taken place since 2009 and followed several projects to date: PBeware Fanaticism (2009-2011); PEETA - Personal Effectiveness and Employability Through the Arts (2010-2012); International Puppet & Mime Festival of Kilkis Grécia (2011-2013); Altriluoghi!! Otherplaces!! (2013-2015); and Partners In Crime Prevention (2013-2015).

As can be seen in Table 1, over the eight years of the association, they have developed activities in the four areas of intervention, with a recent increase in community theatre projects. To better understand the progress of activities it is necessary to explain that there are five working groups that were created from the association's projects, each one working autonomous and continuously in different intervention areas. However, since 2014 with the spectacle *Mapa* (2014-2015), these groups began to work together more continued and steadily for a common project for almost two years. Specifically, we are referring to the following groups: : 1) *AGE – Grupo de Teatro do Oprimido* that is a group of young people in the centre of the city that perform Theatre of the Oppressed; 2) *Grupo de Teatro do Oprimido Auroras* that is a group of women in Lagarteiro's neighborhood, in the east of the city; 3) *Grupo de Teatro Comunitário EmComum de Lordelo do Ouro* that is a group of community theatre in Lodelo do Ouro neighborhood, in the west of the city of Porto; 4) *Grupo de Teatro Comunitário da Zona Histórica* which is a group of community theatre in the historical centre of Porto; 5) *Grupo de Teatro de Surdos do Porto* that is a deaf theatre group that share "the desire of building bridges between the Deaf and Listener communities, which have been establishing a dialogue through the theater - as a universal language" (Pele s/n).

The groups identification, which together involve about a hundred people, allows us to better understand the ways of working of the association that is geographically present in three areas of Porto, as we can see in the following map.

The stars in the map show the community theatre groups and the territories that they belong to. The red dot is the *Pele* head office in the street *Rua da Alegria*. The rehearsals happen in different places according to each project, but often they take place at the *Pele* head office. There are also other groups in other territories that *Pele* accompanied at the time of creation and which has some partnerships but does not constitute the hard-core of the association activities since they act independently and without frequent interactions.

Some temporary considerations

Therefore, according to the collected documents, the *Pele* association developed directly a total of forty-five projects over the eight years of activity and until date: three in prisons, seventeen projects from community work, four projects carried out with the deaf theatre group, and twenty-one projects in the Theatre of the Oppressed and training. At the moment there are in progress four projects named *Mexe*, *ECOAR*, *Mapa* and *Passeios ao Pôr do Sol*.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Europacolon (4)										
Preto às cores (4)										
Nem anjo, nem diabo (4)										
O que é que tu queres mais? (4)										
Nascemos da água e à água voltaremos (3)										
Eram umas quantas vezes (3)										
Metó a colher (4)									*	
Ler-te ao perto (4)									*	
Texturas (2)										
Ciclo de teatro do oprimido (4)										
Iniciação ao teatro do oprimido (4)										

³ Displayed as "Projects in progress" or "Available for circulation" on the website.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Lgt mexe (2)										
Entrado (1)										
Agosto azul (2)										
Miguel + Rita (4)										
Diz-crime-na-acção (4)										
Curso de teatro do oprimido (4)										
Teatro fórum e violência (4)										
Curingagem (4)										
Laboratório Madalena (4)										
Capital europeia da cultura Guimarães 2012 (2)										
Férias na quinta (2)										
Quase nada (3)										
Mexe: i encontro de arte e comunidade (2)						1				
Procura-se futuro (4)										
Aurora (4)									*	
Arco-íris do desejo (4)										
Teatro-fórum – a estruturação da pergunta (4)										
Raízes e asas (4)										
Inesquecível emília (1)										
Siga a rusga (2)										
Peregrinações (2)										
Espelho (4)									*	
Nós (3)									*	
Povoar (2)									*	
Terra (2)									*	
Mostra de vídeos de teatro comunitário (2)										
Mexe: ii (2)										
Tam... O caminho do rio (2)										
Hoje é dia de festa (4)										
Mapa (2)										
Passeios ao pôr do sol (2)										
Mexe iii (2)										
Salta (2)										
Ecoar. Empregabilidade, competências e arte (1)										

Table 1 – A diachronic analysis of Pele – Espaço de Contacto Social a Cultural activities

Source: Performed by the author resulting from the documentary analysis of the website: www.apele.org

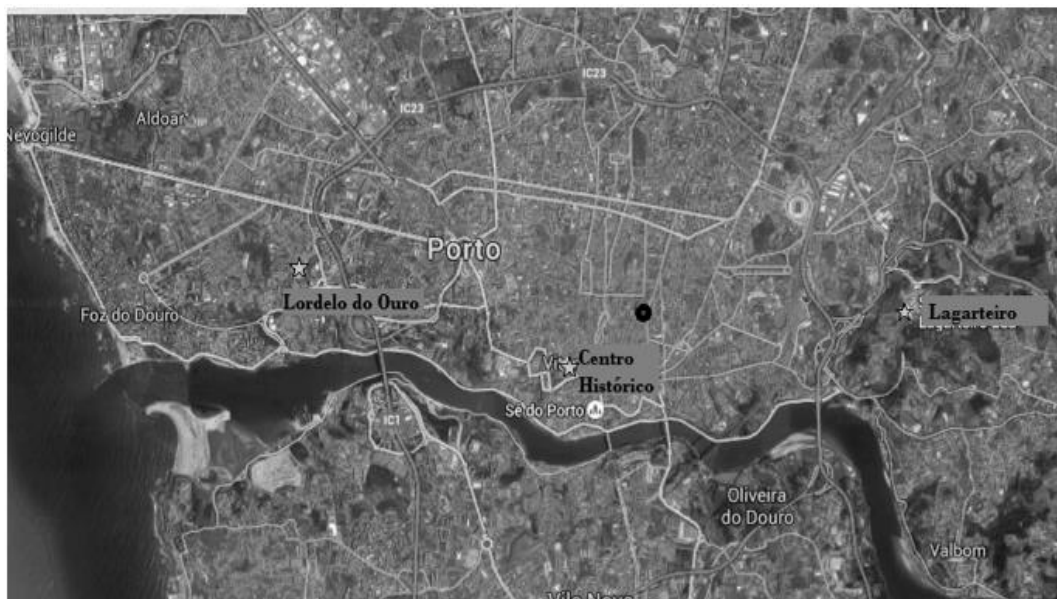


Figure 1 – Acting territories of Pele – Espaço de Contacto Social e Cultural activities

Source: Adapted by the author from Google Maps: <https://www.google.it/maps/@41.1194156,-8.6110385,9569m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=it>

This association has developed two kinds of activities: the ones that are occasional activities and the long-term activities. In this case is important the role that the five groups have in a continuity perspective. In other words, the association works with projects of limited time, but the constitution of territorial groups allows a continued approach in the territories and with the people involved, especially in regard to the Theatre of the Oppressed, community and deaf people. In this respect, it can be seen the integration of people from groups in the body of the association and in the follow-up of new projects.

This association has different levels of institutionalization: there is a *continuum* where in one side there are projects in public spaces without relation with other institutions and on the opposite side projects with public support as the ones performed in penitentiary institutions. In the middle of the continuum they have projects in partnership with the National Theatre, for example.

In this preliminary part of the present research we have observed the financial sustainability of the *Pe/e* projects, looking at their projects continuity, although it is quite difficult to anticipate the future activities without a long-term perspective.

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