

Communicating bottom-up social development



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Social transformations in Brazil: Continuing a dialogue on bottom-up experiences of social development

In the first post of the Favelas@LSE Blog, Sandra Jovchelovitch and Jacqueline Priego discuss recent transformations in social development and civic engagement in Brazil. Drawing inspiration from previous research on NGOs in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, they explain why the current climate of social change in Brazilian society lays the grounds for a productive knowledge exchange initiative.

This is a momentous time for Brazil: the country has positioned itself as the **seventh economy in the world**, its **middle class has progressively expanded** and **levels of inequality and poverty have sharply decreased**. Social policies such as **Bolsa Família** and **Minha Casa, Minha Vida** (My House, My Life) have set out an ambitious agenda to improve the lives of the poorest in the country. The eyes of the world are focused on Brazilian cities hosting the Football World Cup, a taste of what is to come in 2016 when Rio de Janeiro will be in charge of the Olympics. On the political front, a wave of street demonstrations and social unrest has confirmed **the vitality of Brazilian civil society**. Brazilian democracy is strong and presidential elections will be held in October.



Credit: Underground Sociabilities Project

Such exciting times have brought effervescence to the Brazilian public sphere, triggering renewed civic engagement at every layer of Brazilian society. **Middle classes, favelas in the periphery of large cities** and the **wealthy elites** are as active as ever, expressing a new polyphony of interests and messages which complicate any easy reading of the country. The direction of Brazilian social and economic development is being decided in Brasilia as well as in civic associations and in the streets, taking into account actors and arenas historically excluded from real centres of influence and decision-making. Coming to terms with policies of redistribution and recognition is creating a unique set of challenges and particularly so to an elite used to enjoying alone the benefits of a rich and beautiful country. Phenomena such as the **rolezinhos**, in which young, black, mainly peripheral kids take over swanky shopping malls and white upper class areas, are indicative of a new type of daring that subverts the established geography of social exclusion in the country. In these current processes of civic engagement, new social actors are organising themselves and forming grassroots movements that reclaim power and re-signify what was until recently a well-defined identity of Brazilian social class.

The entrance of **young and black favela residents** is a major novelty in the landscape of civil society mobilisation in Brazil. It expands and consolidates the **civic culture of the country** and brings to the centre of political decision-making the unique experiences and perspectives of actors traditionally

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Social media



excluded. [LSE research](#) on NGOs [AfroReggae](#) and [Central Única das Favelas](#) shows that these actors are genuinely bottom-up and organically connected to territories of exclusion. They express the ideas and perspectives of favela youth and seek to counteract dominant representations that stereotype favelas as sites of criminality and failure. They are fiercely determined to cross the urban divide and push the State, institutions and ordinary Brazilians into recognising the capacity and strength of [underground sociabilities](#).

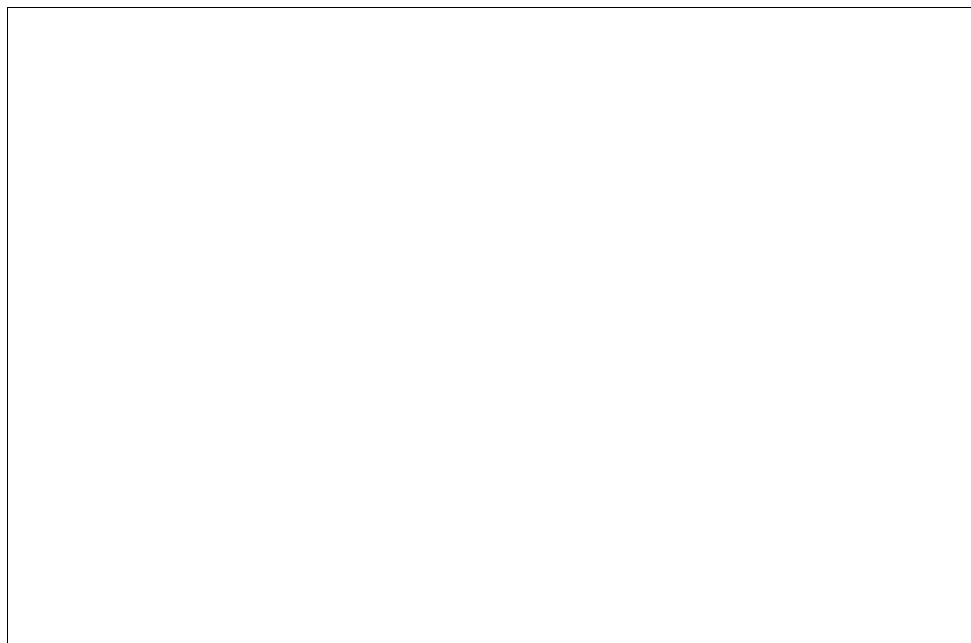


Credit: Underground Sociabilities Project

Bottom-up experiences of social development in Rio de Janeiro offer a platform for discussion and collaboration with and between the global south and the global north. Developed economies are not exempt from pockets of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. Pockets of invisibility and underground sociabilities exist everywhere. Much remains to be done to understand the barriers to human-centred social development and the pathways that define the lives and agency of socially

excluded communities.

This blog seeks to exchange knowledge on social development initiatives at the grassroots level. We have started a [dialogue between the UK and Brazil](#) and very much hope that it can go further, providing a space for reflection, sharing of experiences and debate for academics, activists, policy-makers, students and practitioners.



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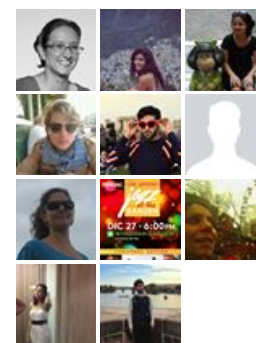
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