

Informal, Formal, Collaborative – identifying new models of services within favelas of Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

Favelas in Rio de Janeiro are places characterized by the lack of infrastructure and access to services. Nevertheless, when looking more closely at these communities, it becomes apparent the power that their social fabric has to create solutions, opening field for the emergence of social innovations. In fact, preliminary research suggests a set of cases where people are already imagining and conceiving a new generation of services within these communities. This article introduces a research about services that arise from social innovations initiatives within favelas of Rio de Janeiro. More precisely, it describes how locals, using social networks connections inside favelas, can design services and how service design can be inspired from these cases to suggest ideas of new service models. In order to illustrate that, a study case about Favela Orgânica is presented, a service born in the Favela of Babilônia that promotes new ways to deal with food.

KEYWORDS: service design, social innovation, creative communities

Introduction

Underserved communities are complex social ecosystems characterized by, on the one hand, the informality and density of their social networks and, on the other hand, the lack of basic services and the marginalization of a system that fails to meet their local needs. Traditional ties - made inside family, neighbourhood and village - can be the source of positive strength, knowledge and powerful social cohesion for them.

These communities are usually, but not exclusively, placed on informal settlements, which are defined as urban areas that operate at the limits or beyond the regulations that govern cities. Brazilian favelas, South African townships, North African shantytowns, Indian slums or the problematic neighbourhoods of towns in northern countries: altogether a billion of people are estimated to live in such places today.

Looking more closely at this complex reality, it is apparent that the social and human capital that exists within underserved communities could be used to solve problems of everyday life faced by this population, in a more open, flexible and transparent manner. As a matter of fact, preliminary research suggests a set of promising cases of people that are already imagining and conceiving a new generation of services within these communities. We

identify these services as being born from social innovation initiatives, since they expose new ways of doing and thinking, motivated by the goal of meeting common goods, in order to satisfy unmet local needs. They are also based on the active participation of those who benefit directly from them, what shows their potential to be collaborative services.

This article introduces a research about services that arise from social innovation cases within favelas of Rio de Janeiro. More precisely, it describes how locals, using social connections inside favelas, can design services and how service design can be inspired from these cases to suggest ideas of new service models. For that, a literature review is presented about service design, social innovation and the concept of favela. The idea is to expose, first, how creative initiatives can arise in a place that suffers from a lack of basic services, expressing new tendencies of living together, and second, how service design can collect ideas for new service models, understanding the project created by the own community and through a human-centred perspective. In order to illustrate that, a study case about Favela Orgânica is presented, a service born in the Favela of Babilônia (south zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro) that promotes the total use of vegetables and fruits to cook and to fertilize home gardens.

Favelas in Rio de Janeiro

Favelas in the city of Rio de Janeiro are popular worldwide. This happens because of their aesthetics (formed mostly by self-built houses), the informality that permeates their social/work relations, their poverty and lack of access to services that are already provided in the rest of the city. It is common to represent favelas as something homogeneous, identifying these spaces by the “strong socio-spatial stigmatization, specially inferred by the residents of the other parts of the city.” (Silva, 2009, p. 22-23). For IBGE, the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, “a favela is a settlement of 50 housing units or more located on public or private property and characterized by disordered occupation without the benefits of essential public services.” (Dymski, 2011, p. 10). This author identifies, through an economical view, the contrasts between the favela and the non-favela urban economy. He analyses the differences between the formal and informal spaces in the city, which includes:

Homes that have numerical addresses, and those without them; homes built by trained architects and certified contractors, and those built by the eye; places where the roads are maintained by municipal or state governments, and places without maintained roads. (Dymski, 2011, p. 10).

This definition is based on dichotomies, i.e., what is and what is not a favela. However, when we analyse the favelas more closely, regarding the context of the city of Rio de Janeiro, each one has its own history and local identity. Even the aesthetics aspects change; there are favelas placed in lower class buildings, for example. Therefore, a favela may be defined by specific characteristics. Firstly, favelas are visibly different from the rest of the city (lack of infrastructure and access to basic services); secondly, they are formed by poor people, but most of them are workers, who sustain their families by formal and informal jobs; and finally, they have their own culture (their own formation history).

Briefly, favelas are places that suffer from the lack of access to a structure already provided to the rest of the city. Thus, the stereotype associated with them is the idea of lacking: “under this perspective, the favela is defined by what it is not or by what it has not.” (Silva, 2009, p. 16). Since 2008, the creation of the Pacifying Police Units (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora, 2014), a project from the government of Rio de Janeiro, has been contributing

for the states' increasing participation within some of these communities, especially against the drug and gun traffic, what has been resulting in improvements for their infrastructure. Nonetheless, despite of these improvements, people within favelas search for new alternatives to better their daily lives.

In fact, it is precisely the stigma of lack within these communities that makes people to come together to work collaboratively, aiming for common social and economic benefits. Under the perspective of service design, a study about social innovations that emerge from favelas is interesting, since designers could search for potentialities of new models of services within these communities.

Creative communities and social innovations within favelas

The favelas in Rio de Janeiro are commonly referred to as communities ('comunidades'). Different social networks form these spaces, what facilitates the relations among their actors, in the search for individual and common benefits. Larissa Lomnitz (2009), a Latin-American thinker who researches about the central role of social networks within urban studies, claims that organisations that arise from informal communities use traditional institutions to survive. These institutions are "family, friendship, membership of an ethnic group or system of beliefs", that base themselves on their "cultural definition of trust and loyalty, which are central elements to the work of informal networks". (Lomnitz, 2009, p. 19). To this author, "a social network is a field of relations among individuals", that establishes "complex relations within a specific social space." (Lomnitz, 2009, p. 19). These relationships allow the formation of solidarity networks, what "implies in an exchange system of goods, services and information that occurs within the sociability". (Lomnitz, 2009, p. 19).

New arrangements of social actors are formed from these networks, what permits them to find new ways to solve their daily problems. These groups of people can be identified as creative communities (Meroni, 2007), because "they are deeply rooted in a place, they make good use of the local resources and, directly or indirectly, they promote new ways of social exchange." (ibid, p. 14). Several cases reveal this reality. On the one hand, we have neighbours that share contracted services of Internet, teenagers that get together to create blogs to write about events happening in their community, and people that organise themselves to cook and sell meals locally. On the other hand, there are women that, together, take care of the community's children, while parents are working; people that, with the assistance of external actors, create radio station inside the community; children and adults who find new ways to direct garbage to handicraft practices or organic waste as fertilizer to plants.

In all of these cases, it is clear the importance of social networks and relationships within these communities. Social connections like those constitute a true social capital, according to Lomnitz (2009). These new arrangements of social actors generate opportunities for the emergence of social innovations. Identifying social innovations in favelas means recognizing new activities or new ideas, that were generated by novel strategies to form social relations among actors, motivated by the goal of meeting common goods to satisfy unmet social needs (Cloutier, 2003; Mulgan, 2007; Phills, 2008). This promotes the local empowerment (Cloutier, 2003; Mulgan, 2007) and a process able to be replicated in other communities (Manzini, 2008). Designers that want to identify social innovations in these communities must understand the way their local actors organise themselves, in order to find alternative tactics to design activities that promote income generation, proper waste disposal, education

and care activities for children, and so forth. The focus would be the generation of shareable benefits, according to the local reality.

Values such as trust, reciprocity, mutual aid and reputation are highly valued within favelas, because of the fact that people depend on their social relations to reach their goals. For this reason, many of the services created within these communities are distinguished as being relational (Cipolla, 2009). This opens a promising field of action for service design, which can collect new ideas for business models, implementing them with its tools and methods.

Service design

The area of service design arises because of the increasing importance of the service sector to the world economy. Manzini (2009) states that “in recent decades the focus has progressively moved towards services, while products have been increasingly seen as ‘service evidences’, i.e. physical elements that make services possible”. (Manzini, 2009, p. 47).

Vargo & Lusch (2004) believe that this transition occurred because of changing paradigms. These authors describe a shift from a good-dominant logic to a service-dominant logic. Before, human activity was based on natural and physical resources and, because of that, the ownership of tangible goods was an indication that a person was rich or not. With the industrial revolution and the consequently standardization of durable goods, products’ differentiation started to be considered as valuable, that is, the skills, knowledge and ways of distribution associated to them. From this point on, the importance of services started to grow.

This movement towards an economy of services reflects in new research in areas such as marketing, management, engineering, computing and behavioural science (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). Consequently, the research and practice in design also searches for new directions, from the production of tangible products, to the development of product-service systems (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2002), capable to provide systemic solutions not only to the people, but also to the economy and environment in which they are. Thus, service design provides a holistic approach to create and implement services, addressing “functionality and form of services from the perspective of the user.” (Mager, 2009, p. 34).

Coming back to the context of favelas and the social innovations identified within them (e.g. caring services for children, services for garbage reuse, alternative communication networks and communitarian cooking services), we can say that there are services in informal settlements that arise from social relations based on the need to solve daily issues. Based on their interests, people may get involved in a process of designing services, where a whole system of supply, production and distribution is planned. In other words, from the case of women that organise places where parents can leave their children during the workday, to people that buy vegetables and fruits to cook and sell them as a food service: all those actors are involved with some kind of creative community. They service their neighbours, friends and relatives, in order to benefit financially and socially from that.

This opens our eyes to important issues. First: those people inside favelas, even being marginalised from the system and with less access to public resources when compared to the rest of the city, succeed in organising themselves and designing their own solutions to their problems. This reminds us the concept of silent design (Gorb & Dumas, 1987), which can be entirely applied here. Gorb & Dumas (1987), when examining the aspects of business

where design is utilized, argue that many design activities that go on in organisations are not called as design. The authors say that those activities are “carried out by individuals who are not called designers and who would not consider themselves to be designers. We have called this 'silent design'.” (Gorb & Dumas, 1987, p. 3). They base their design definition on the well-known concept of Herbert Simon (1982) that defines design as “a course of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.” (Simon, 1982 cited in Gorb & Dumas, 1987, p. 2). Likewise, the intention of changing an existing reality is present in favelas, where people use the available resources to create collaborative ways to achieve individual and common benefits. This calls our attention to show how the recognition of the local identity, the need to solve problems, and the collaborative capacity of certain human groups motivate people’s ability to design. Second: people within favelas could be successful with their plans, because the local social fabric supported them. With their families, friends and neighbourhood association, they could amplify their networks, to activate external institutions to support them to achieve their own goals. For that, they used their social capital, that is, the values that they could count on: reputation, moral, confidence, and relationships within the local network. This shows how the services that arise from this kind of initiatives are inherently relational, based on collaboration and shared benefits.

In these cases, services can be identified, according to Manzini (2009), as collaborative services. In the same way, many of the services that arise from favelas are relational services (Cipolla, 2009), those “in which participants need not only to be operationally active and collaborative, but also well-inclined and willing to relate with other in a personal manner.” (Cipolla, 2012, p. 35).

Finally, thinking in service design that meets demands coming from social innovations cases, opens field to research about service design for social innovation.

Service design for social innovation

The research and practice in the areas of social innovation and sustainability also contribute to the area of service design, because of the possibility of dematerialization of products (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2002), and the appreciation of services that were born inside creative communities. In the case of product-service-systems, it is possible to offer the value that a product would offer without the need of its possession. Here the central idea is that “users are not really wanting a product or service, but rather what these products and services enable a user to achieve” (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2002, p. 05). Now, when talking about design for social innovation (Manzini, 2008), it is possible to describe the collaborative services that may arise from these types of initiatives, since to happen they “ask for the direct and active involvement of all the interested actors, final users included”. (Manzini, 2009, p. 50). Work performed on projects like EMUDE - Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions - (Meroni, 2007) demonstrate the potential that social innovation has in creating new forms of social organisations, in order to solve demands for services that are not offered by the market or the government. There is, therefore, a possibility of interface between the areas of service design and social innovation, where services could be drawn or implemented from social innovation initiatives. This may be referred to as service design for social innovation.

In order to report how service design could be inspired from social innovation cases to suggest ideas for new models of services, aiming the improvement and replication of their values, this article describes the case of Favela Orgânica. This project is developed within the Favela of Babilônia, Rio de Janeiro, and focuses on the total use of vegetables and fruits

(including their peel, which is their most nutritional part) to prepare food and to incentivise the creation of home gardens.

Favela Orgânica project - context

Favela of Babilônia is located between the neighbourhoods of Botafogo, Urca and Leme, in the south zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In 2010, the population of Favela of Babilônia was estimated in 2,451 people, installed in 777 residences (IBGE, 2010). The study developed by FIRJAN – *Federação das Indústrias do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* – shows that, in a population of 2,162 people, 26.9% are poor - the household income is R\$ 235.08 per month, approximately 98.05 US Dollar - and 6.4% are indigents - the household income is R\$ 117.54 per month, approximately 49.03 US Dollar – (FIRJAN, 2010). In spite of the fact that favelas are characterised by informality in several aspects, about 54.3% of Favela of Babilônia's population has a formal job (FIRJAN, 2010).

Regina Tchelly, after years working as a house cleaner, decided to start her own project, based on buffet services and cooking workshops using all parts of vegetable and fruits, including their peel, which is their most nutritional part. With her expertise about cooking, she started to teach people how to prepare recipes as pies, snacks and cakes made with banana peel, the talus of the broccolis, watermelon skin, etc. In the same way, she started to teach how to create small gardens inside home, using the rest of the vegetable waste as fertilizer for plants.

Favela Orgânica as a social innovation case

In order to study the case of Favela Orgânica as a social innovation initiative, informal interviews were made with Regina Tchelly and pictures were taken from her project. The focus was to identify which new ideas, generated by novel strategies to form social relations, were empowering the local community, as well as which new models of services could be imagined from that.

From all the information collected, Favela Orgânica is concluded as a social innovation case because:

- » It stimulates a new way of cooking, which is focused on the total use of vegetables and fruits;
- » It promotes new social interactions between people from the favela and outside of it, since most part of the clients is external. This is strategic to reduce the favela's unfair stereotype and to present its services as also competitive in the market;
- » The service promotes the transmission of a traditional knowledge, what teaches people new ways to deal and appreciate their food;
- » As the initiative goes against the food waste, it is in agreement with a low environmental impact, preventing further formation of organic waste;
- » It regenerates the social fabric, as it generates jobs especially for women in the region.

In figure 1 we can see a picture from the Favela of Babilônia, where the project is developed. It is also possible to see who is Regina Tchelly and some of the local and external actors (Slow Food Brazil) that work for the project to succeed.



Figure 1: Collection of pictures that illustrate the Favela Orgânica project.

Favela Orgânica as a service

When analysing the Favela Orgânica case under the service design perspective, it is possible to highlight the main actions during the service journey (Figure 2).

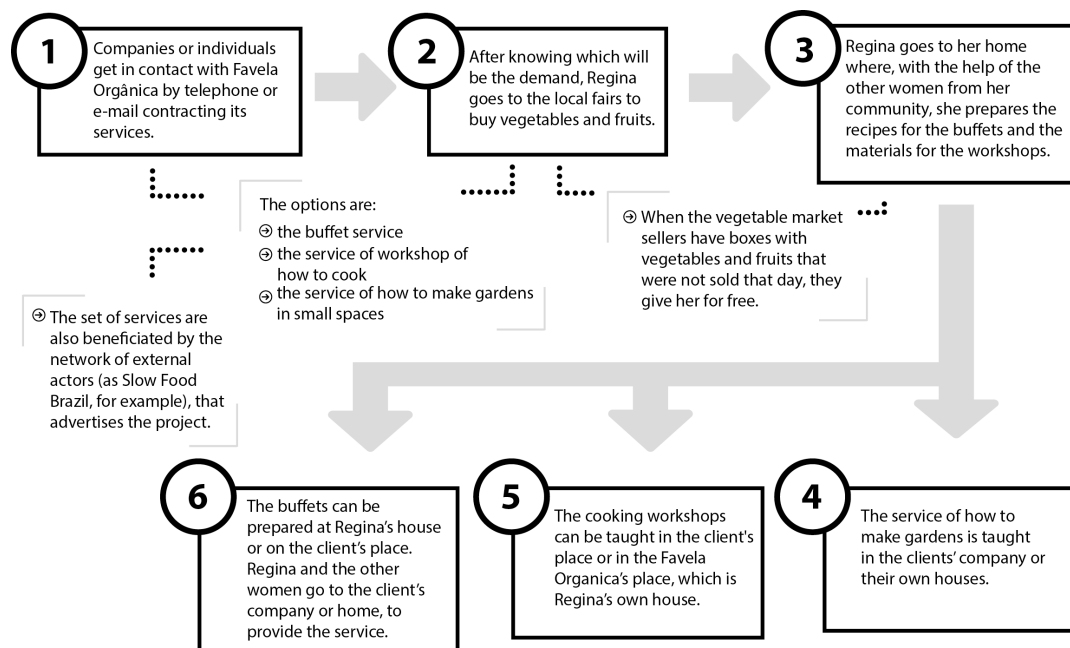


Figure 2: Favela Orgânica's service journey.

From this analysis and the information already presented, it is possible to explain why Favela Orgânica may serve as inspiration for new models of services:

- **Service's origin:** the idea to get the most from all parts of vegetable and fruits was something that was taught by Regina's family and has been improved by experimentation. This indicates a source of potential ideas to create original services – the culture identity.

- **Service model:** the implementation of Favela Orgânica started with Regina and friends; it expanded to the local neighbourhood association that helped it to call external attention of partners, as Slow Food Brazil, what finally led it to become a micro-business. This shows that new models of services can be prototyped from informal basis, what permits them to get adapted according to the situations that arise, until the moment they get mature enough to be formalized.
- **Supply system:** local vegetable sellers provide vegetables and fruits. When they have vegetables that were not sold and that may be spoiled, they give to Regina for free. This creates a relationship of fidelity, since Regina keeps going to buy with the same sellers. This also could be improved by creating a connection with organic farmers that could deliver the vegetables periodically and directly to Regina's house.
- **Service delivery:** Women in uniforms go to the customer's location (company, house, etc.), where usually the service is provided. This strategy makes service delivery more practical for clients that do not have to go until the favela to be served. Besides, Regina teaches courses at her house or at the neighbourhood's association, what can be a differential for people that have curiosity in visiting the favela.

Therefore, Favela Orgânica can be analysed as a collaborative service, since it is based on a system of collaborative social connections. They are local vegetable sellers that sell their products and give Regina the ones that were not sold; the local community helps her to prepare buffets and workshops, and the external supporters, like Slow Food Brazil, that gave to the project material resources to improve its processes and advertise its services. Favela Orgânica is based on trustful relations among those actors, and Regina Tchelly, with all her effort to make the project succeed, is the main actor, whose personal reputation advertises its services outside the favela.

Suggesting new models of services from Favela Orgânica social innovation's case

After analysing Favela Orgânica as a social innovation and a service, it is possible to recognize the values presented by the project, in order to use them to suggest ideas for new models of services. The following values are identified:

- » New ways of cooking;
- » New social relations among actors within a community and between the community and external actors, based on confidence, loyalty and reputation;
- » Transmission of traditional knowledge;
- » Generation of employment and income within the community;
- » Prevention of food waste;
- » Regeneration of the local social fabric.

These collected values are clues to imagine a new set of services models. The services that could be developed from these seeds are rooted in a local context and based on social relationships within a community, which means that they are better adapted to people's reality and likely to create better conditions of life. Thinking about the values proposed by the case of Favela Orgânica, the following ideas were suggested in a design for social innovation course of the Graduation Program of Production Engineering at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in 2013:

- » **My vegetable market seller, my friend:** Service based on the relation between customers and vegetable sellers. People that go to the local vegetable markets to buy fruits and vegetables can take home that ones that will not be sold that day. With that, people can prepare less expensive recipes and sellers earn people's loyalty to buy always with them.
- » **Cooking for learning and learning for cooking:** Service where people from the same community get together to cook and to teach other people from different generations how to cook. While cooking together, people talk and learn about the nutritional value of the food being prepared, as well as having a convivial space within their community.
- » **Decentralized home garden:** A group of people, where each one is responsible to produce one type of vegetable/spice/tea in his own home, in order to share his production in exchange for other products. This would stimulate people to learn about home garden practices and the nutritional/medical value of the species they are planting.
- » **A systemic producing-preparing-eating food service:** An extended partnership among agriculture producers, a group of cooks from the same community and local companies, integrating a whole system of providing organic food, preparing dishes and selling them on-demand for people that work and do not have time to prepare their own food.

All these ideas refer to the possibility of creating services based on already existing social relations. They were not implemented, but they can serve as inspiration to be. They would strength chains of social networks, promoting values as reputation for one side and loyalty for the other. Briefly, they are all win-win relations: all collaborates and all profits from them.

Conclusions

Favelas in Rio de Janeiro are places where it is possible to see great creativity to solve daily problems. In order to work and find new ways of livelihood, it is common that people organise themselves in groups of friends and relatives, so they can collaborate and achieve sharable benefits. The power of these communities comes from their social capital, which increases the chances of finding social innovations cases among them. When service designers face this type of reality, they recognise different ways that people can relate to each other, creating new ways to serve and provide services, already being prototyped in real life. These ongoing experimentations of different ways to collaborate may represent a new generation for services. The presented case of Favela Orgânica demonstrates how an innovation in the way of cooking linked with new partnerships among actors can converge to the creation of a mix of services that empowers the local community and advertises the favela for the rest of the city. The ideas of new service models presented in this article indicate that it is not difficult to innovate, since this can happen by only articulating new forms of partnerships and using the social relations that already exist within a community.

This article demonstrates preliminary results of a research promoted by DESIS network, which is creating a new cluster named Informal, Formal, Collaborative: designing within underserved communities (IFC). The purpose of the IFC cluster is to identify potential ideas for a new generation of services that could be designed from the underserved communities' perspective.

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