





Connecting education, communities and social development: epistemologies of everyday experience

Uses and meanings of urban space for homeless people in the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina – UB / UBA

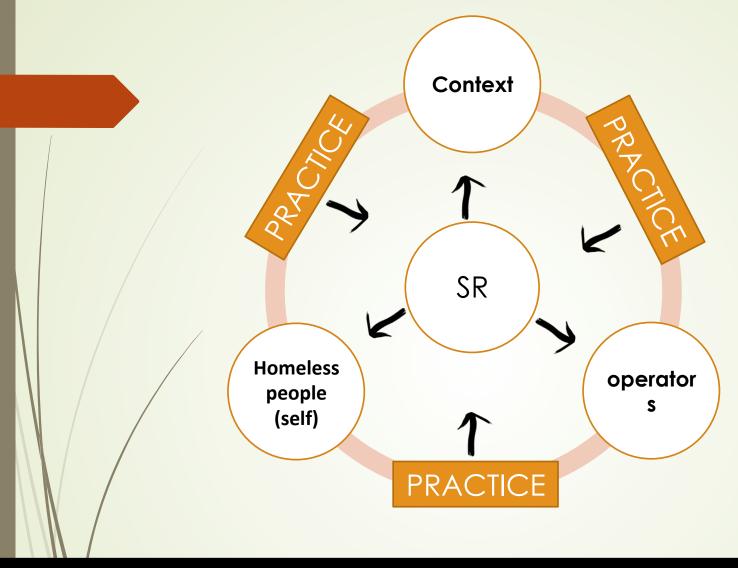
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## Homeless people street people, street dwellers, street inhabitants

- Psychosocial vulnerabilities: weakening of social & family support network, isolation, physical & mental health, violence, cultural and political rights
- Material & symbolic possession/ dispossession
- Street: shelter, relational invisible network, ephemeral, social inequality, injustice
- Stigmatized identities

# HOMELESS PEOPLE IN ARGENTINA

- progressive growth since the '70s. Jump since 2001. Increase in large urban centers. "Assisted citizenship": except as normal (Agamben). 900/16000.
- Chronic situation, identified for what they lack
- Different social assistance devices, including socioeducational activities, depend on public policies implemented by civil organizations, religious and other autonomous ones.
- Community-based approaches, for people in social, economic & legal disadvantage.



What meanings do homeless people attach to these socioassistance proposals and to the participation in them? What kind of practices generate these SRs?

### Methodology

- Qualitative-descriptive action research
- Objective: Describe life paths & identity. Space of participation & collective reflection
- Questions: What link is there homeless/devices?
- What SR circulate of homeless?
- What intervention practices do they shape?
- What identity spaces emerge?
- In which social discourses are they anchored?
- PARTICIPATION: Community Social Psychology+ critical reflection+ promotion of social change+inclusion+ respect for diversity+democratization of power
- Conventional research techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, graphic techniques, words association

## Methodology

- Unconventional techniques: collective mapping, drama games, feedback sessions. Research as social practice of knowledge
- Fieldwork:
- 1) Participatory diagnosis
- 2) Problematization
- 3) First intervention

# Rigorous procedures

- a) Comparison & integration with previous documentation and works
- b) Conceptual saturation criteria
- c) Triangulation techniques
- d) Feedback sessions
- e) Data analysis: theory based on facts (Strauss & Corbin)+ Content Analysis (Bardin)

# Stage 1: Participatory diagnosis

- Goal: problematic of homeless people in Bs As
- Sample & Participants: intentional by criteria, by quota of institutional membership; 5 homeless people; 10 social operators
- Instruments: in-depth interviews institutional care, SR, social discourses
- Results: Homeless as objects of care: assisted citizenship: "un or dis processes" disaffiliated, disengaged, unemployed/ "re process", reinsert, reintegrate, retrain, reaffiliate

# Definition of Homeless person

- Un or dis processes
- "This is social failure, failure of integration; many times people have lived on the street, people who ascended socially precariously but different social and economic situations pushed them to the street because they could not afford the rent or whatever it was at that time." (Volunteer at a religious organization)
- It is the societally excluded group that lives on the street as the only option. Then it includes both the people circulating and living on the street, such as the cartoneros (cardboard collectors), and those staying in shelters, in precarious accommodation they had access to through a housing subsidy; these are the girls and boys on the street." (Volunteer at a non-governmental organization)

# Definition of Homeless person

#### Re processes

- There are some people for whom it suddenly clicks, someone tells them something that helps them get out of the street life. Perhaps with a little accompaniment, or an antidepressant, family support, they can leave the street, yeah." (Street operator, governmental agency)
- "There are those who can sustain a link with a partner, and you realize that they have at least a bond; they are not so disengaged." (Psychologist, governmental agency)

## Genesis of homelessness

### Individual-family

"Men who separated, left home, lost their jobs, have nowhere to go. There are many men like that; you see them trying to remain clean and wandering around... who perhaps have no network of family or friends that may support them and who suddenly find themselves on the streets. Or they are embarrassed to ask for help and are on the street for that reason. Women who are also alone, who separated. Retirees, many retirees, they don't have enough money and end up on the street." (Volunteer, self-convened community group)

## Genesis of homelessness

## Individual - family

"Gambling, alcohol, drugs ... and also many people who have come from the inland and have had a criminal problem, or something happened and they lost contact with their families." (Volunteer, religious organization)

## Genesis of homelessness

#### Socio-historical

- "All this context (referring to social fragmentation and marginalization) somehow falls within the subjectivity of the subject. The speaking subject, if you listen, will transmit all that. He/she presents him/herself as poor, ugly, fearful, threatening." (Social worker, governmental agency)
- "It has to do not only with material resources or the economic condition, with what these people have or don't have, but also with the result of a process of an excluding society." (Psychologist, non-governmental organization)

# Homeless people as objects of care/subjects

- As Objects: those who cannot, who have problems, who do not want to, who are irresponsible
- Product or intersubjective negotiation of meaning, stigma: **Deficit logic**, dependency &welfarism
- As subjects: definition of re processes, autonomy, empowerment

# Type of relationship between homeless people and the social assistance devices

- Dependency/Welfarism- Tutelar logic: distant otherness, moralistic ethics
- "The city government thinks of the homeless problem as a housing problem, so their policies and programs are intended to address the housing emergency, and this is how subsidies or lodgings appear; but that in itself is a limitation. And then, also the Church thinks of this as charitable help to alleviate the situation, and it reinforces these circles, these circuits where people mechanically circulate in these areas, reproducing the exclusion and the street situation." (Psychologist, non governmental organization)

# Type of relationship between homeless people and the social assistance devices

- Autonomy/Empowerment- restorative logic: proximal subjectivity, relational ethics
- "The soup kitchen that belongs to the assembly ... serves homeless people on Sundays ... in a very self-managed mode. It is the homeless people themselves who cook, arrange the space, organize ... playing a strongly active role." (Activist, community social organization)

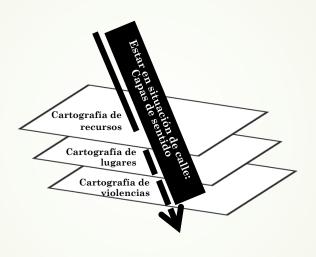
# Type of relationship between homeless people and the social assistance devices

- Autonomy/Empowerment
- "The goal of our project is to provide access to health care to people living on the street, to ensure that the right to health is not infringed." "We believe this is a duty that must be exercised by the State." (Psychologist, nongovernmental organization)

# Stage 2: Problematization

- Goal: descriptions of obstacles, tensions & practices in daily life, by homeless people themselves
- Sample and participants: Intentional nonprobabilistic, snowball, network approach. 15 street people, men & women over 18 years old, living in the street more than 3 years
- Instruments. Collective mapping. 2 focus groups
- Results. 3 levels or layers of meaning

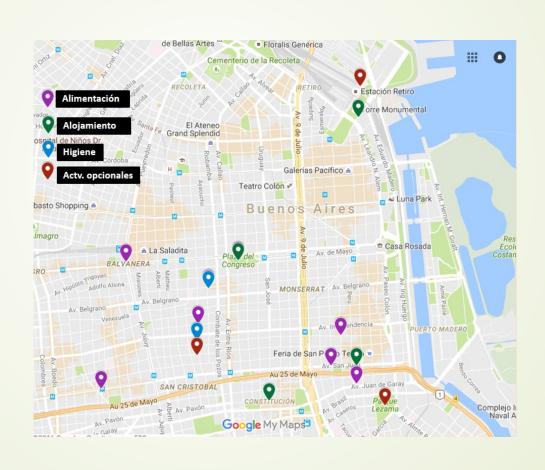
# Cartography of resources.



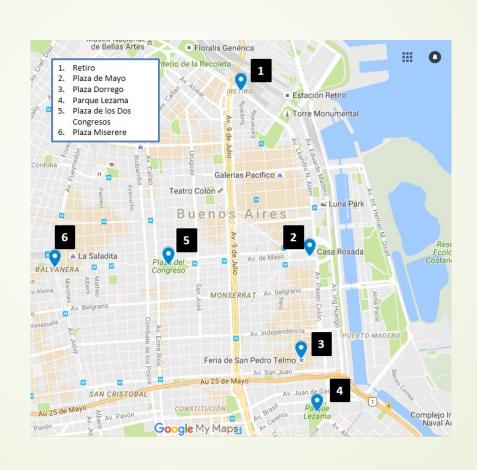
# Cartography of resources

- Services & activities Social assistance circuit - routines
- For basic needs, educational activities, complete formal studies, train in trades
- "activities to make the most of the day", recreational, reduce violence & drug consumption in the public space, expand affective & symbolic exchanges

# Cartography of resources



# Cartography of places

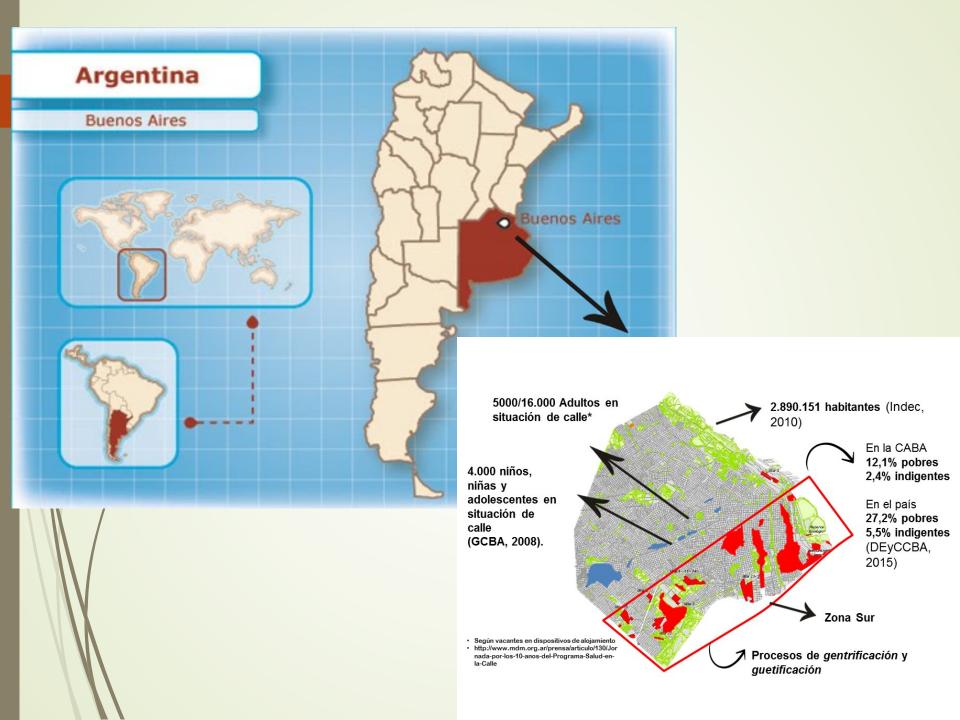


# Cartography of places

- City squares according to use and meaning
- Area of the city
- Mostly squares and parks
- Socially established use/ Use by homeless people
- Plaza de los dos Congresos: Administrative activities, Accommodation
- Drug use, Eating, Survival\*

# Cartography of places

Plaza de Mayo	Social and political demonstrations  Tourism	Accommodation Resistance
Retiro	Long distance bus terminal Commercial activities	Optional activities ** Accommodation
Plaza Miserere	Train terminal  Commercial activities	Eating Optional activities
Parque Lezama Plaza Dorrego	Tourism Tourism	Optional activities Optional activities Survival



# Cartography of violence.

- Discrimination mistreatment stigma
- Street person feels disposable, there is no places to be listened, that is "more than a food service"
- Discomfort anguish lack of friendly spaces

# Meanings of public spaces

- Physical space
- Scenario of basic needs are met: food, clothing, sleep, health, economic survival
- Daily routines

# Social space

- Network of structured assistance, services, private/religious/state/social & political organizations
- Assisted citizenship
- Guilt, infantilization, image of recklessness, irresponsibility, inability
- Subects of government, members of "anti-community", threat, impediment

# Subjective space

- Identity construction in the intersubjectivity
- Material & symbolic vulnerability
   promotes passive participation identity
   result from logic of deficit, negativization.
   The are objects of intervention
- Resistance practices: active relation, strategies, self management, subjects of rights

## Final reflections

- SR: everyday life meanings
- Narratives organizes experiences, alternative worlds, new opportunities
- SR are a tool to make visible common histories and communities of interpretation



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- ✓ Basic needs: food, sleep, clothes
- ✓ Other needs:
  - Reduce drugs use
  - Reduce violence
  - expand affective and symbolic exchanges

Socio-educational activities

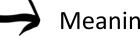


Education highly valued (idealization):
Access to education makes it possible
to reverse inequality was found to be
persistent

Students feel guilt about not having an education: Inadequacy of the self

To be included in a socio-educational project impacted on their daily lives and their trajectories on the street:

- subjective changes ("in me"),
- collective changes ("in the group")
- "out there", referring to the relations with the neighborhood and with other institutions



Meanings of participation