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Ethnic Housing Segregation and the Roma/Gypsy population: A Portuguese Perspective



Content

- Main Theoretical questions
- Focus of the paper
- Research aims and methods
- Conclusions

Ethnic segregation

- Voluntary choice? Self segregation for mutual support & cultural preservation
- Result of resource constraints? Lack of knowledge, income, etc.
- Institutional discrimination? Lack of political or symbolic power

Ethnic segregation main causes

- Cultural: they are concentrated because they choose to cluster in particular areas;
- Structural: because they are poor, lack of resources;
- Postcolonial: because the majority population wants them to live there

Ethnic
segregation:

the product of
social relations
marked by
inequality
of power

- Urban neoliberal policies have contributed to processes of social and territorial segregation and stigmatization.
- The state is an agent of socio- and spatial stratification, relegating certain social groups to an inferior position, condition, or location within the city (Wacquant et al., 2014).

Ethnic segregation:

Advantages and disadvantages

- May be an **advantage** for integration
As social diversity does not necessarily correlates with more interaction and cooperation between people from different ethnic/ social backgrounds
- May be a **barrier** for integration
Bringing together on a single site a population homogeneous in its dispossession strengthens that dispossession, notably with respect to culture and cultural practices (Pierre Bourdieu 1999: 129).

Ethnic segregation of Gypsy/ Roma population

Reasons for the ethnic clustering of families on a number of housing estates:

- a voluntary impulse towards aggregation (therefore perceived positively by residents)?
- a lack of choice (thus an 'institutionalized' or deliberate political choice to put the Gypsy/Roma people at distance)?

Research Aims

- To fill a gap on the preferences of Portuguese Gypsy/Roma families regarding more concentrated or dispersed models of rehousing

The literature review shows that there is a deficit of studies inviting the opinions of Gypsy/Roma about their preferences to live in more or less segregated areas (Schnell and Ostendorf, 2002)

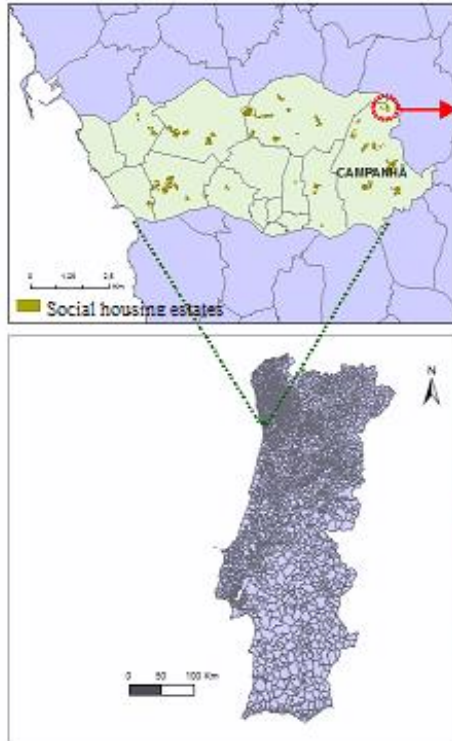
Research Methods

- Project of research conducted between 2007 and 2011, on the effects of area-based initiatives on families/ territories (Alves 2010).
- Results are based on 9 semi-structured in-depth interviews, which lasted between one and two hours, with residents, NGOs, and public officials.

Background Portugal

- High levels of income inequality
- Ethnic minorities are among the poorest groups, and tend to occupy the most degraded segments of the housing market (shanties and less attractive housing estates)
- Social housing in Portugal is restricted to the very poor as represents only 3% of all housing stock.

S. João de Deus @ peripheral social housing estate in Porto



- ✓ 2,600 inhabitants in 2000.
- ✓ 34% of which were of Gypsy/Roma origin and 7% African.
- ✓ The unemployment rate was 35.3% of the total active population.

The election of a new mayor and a right-wing political party in 2001 led to demolition of the SJD neighbourhood.



Between 2003 and 2005, in a context of pronounced police intervention, 25 blocks of multi-family housing were demolished
- a total of 562 housing units



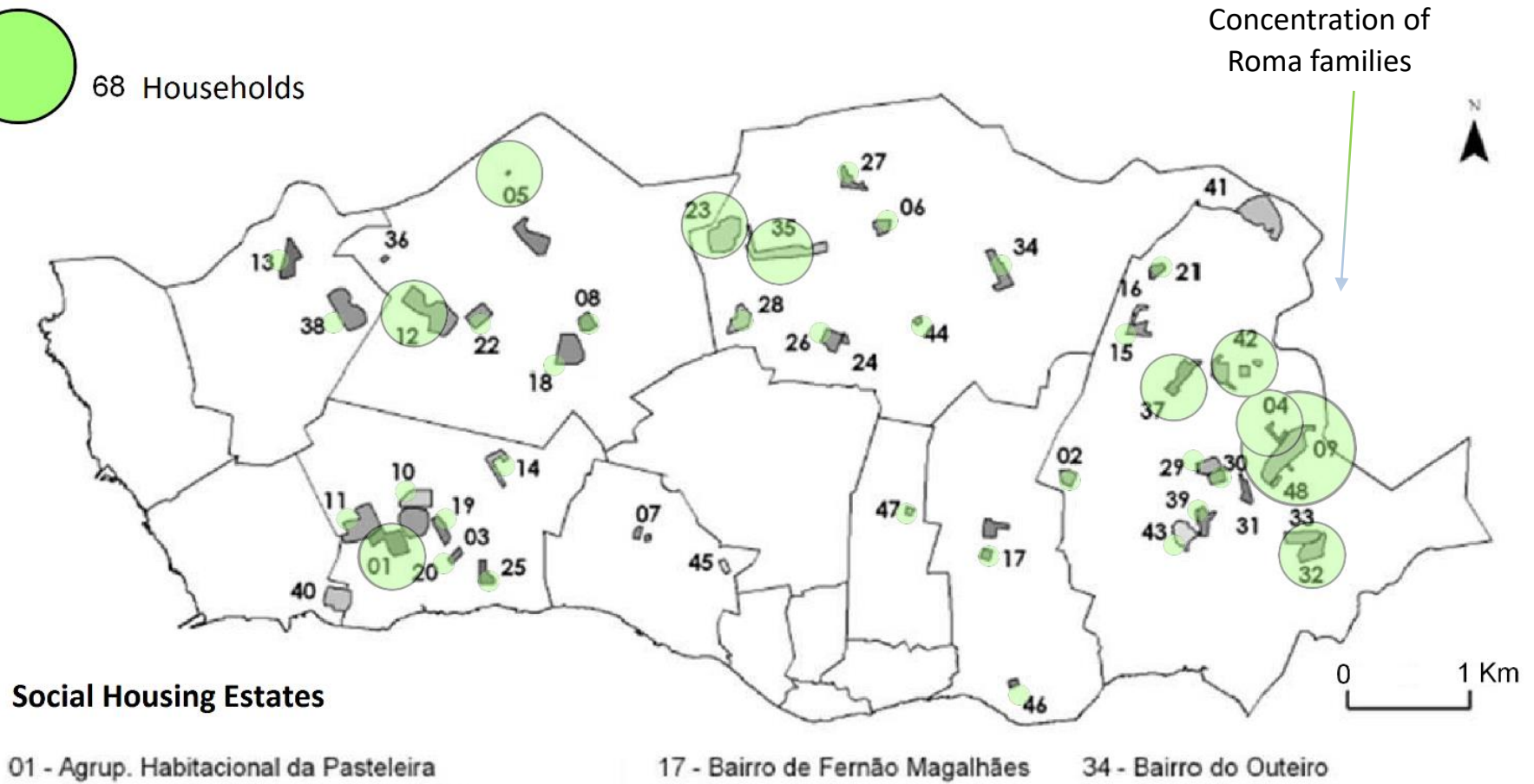
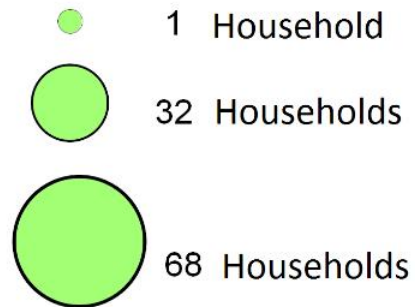
It lead to 162 forced evictions and the displacement of 430 households to other social housing neighbourhoods. The effects of displacement and relocation were not the same for all sub-groups of the population.



The right to housing was denied to many Roma/Gypsy families, contributing to their further marginalization and impoverishment; school dropout rate increased in the community.



Processes of displacement and relocation



The preferences of the Gypsy/Roma families

- Heterogeneous population regarding preferences and discourses regarding rehousing (more concentrated or dispersed)
- There seems to be a general consensus that **the concentration of ethnic communities has not been voluntary**, that the **Gypsy/Roma families have been channeled onto the least attractive housing estates**, locations refused by others.

Preferences of the Gypsy/Roma families

- Living in the vicinity of close relatives is a factor influencing the choice of Gypsy/Roma families that seek to provide support to their senior relatives and children,
- The large concentrations of Gypsy/Roma families does not favour social integration, but instead tend to feed the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (social and territorial stigmatization).

Final thoughts

- The social classes with more power are the motors of spatial segregation, they have more resources to oppose the mix of social classes and ethnicities;
- The majority tend to be defensive regarding minority groups, putting pressures upon public officials to keep certain ethnic groups at a distance;

References

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