

## **The representation of the spontaneous occupations: a study of words and images**

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*Bidonville, slum, favélas, ranchos*, and any name given to a spontaneous occupation are all considered synonyms and a same type of urban tissue. Depending on language, these occupations get different names around the world. However, in our imaginations their appearance are all the same. The truth is there are significant differences between all of these in the way they are presented, portrayed, and targeted on the Internet. Not all spontaneous occupations are the same, and not all spontaneous occupations are given the same type of attention from different audiences. Some spontaneous occupations are acclaimed and some are not. Some are even given high recognition, while other similar structures are merely ignored. There is a contradiction: there is a rejection for the local spontaneous occupation while there is a fascination for the foreign spontaneous occupation.

Spontaneous occupations or low-income settlements tend to be residual spaces of the city and a result of abandonment. They are born out of both the negligent authoritative figures and the hungry body of citizens who -for an unfortunate reason or another- are in a urgent need of a living space. This is why the existence of these occupations is associated with transgression of the urban world. They tend to be born out two transgressive events: the desertion from societal entities of great power and the need from communities who have little to no power.

I aim to create a visual analysis to illustrate (to literally create a visual representation of) our contradictory reality. Upon facing the visual representation, the analysis will inevitably encourage us to inquire and evaluate the positive and negative possibilities the spontaneous cities offer for public policies. I will develop a corpus of images that will result from the use of an internet search engine. These words will come from the group of words that name different occupations around the world, and that are generally understood as synonyms. I want to understand better what -and which- spontaneous housing developments are for different cultures (like

for the European or for the South-American as an example).

I will present the corpus of the research, divided in three essential parts: First the selection of the words, secondly the creation of a bank of images, and finally the construction of the analysis grid.

Sociologist Sylvaine Conord says, *“The role of photography is not to tell the truth, but overall, to enlarge the field of vision and perception of the anthropologist”*.

There is a different perception and connotation for *ranchos* and *favélas* compared with the *bidonville* or *slum*. *Ranchos* and *favélas* are almost synonyms. *Favélas* are presented as touristic, attractive and artistic places. Even though *ranchos* are not presented as touristic places, I have found the image of the *rancho* in Caracas in a tourism website. *Bidonville* and *slums* are almost synonyms as well. Most *bidonvilles* resulted out of events in history. *Slum* is a general more globalized term of study. However, the four words are not synonyms of each other.

There is a polarized vision: the closer one is to the occupation, the less attractive it is to the worldwide public. *Favelas* and *favela/rancho vertical*, are considered exotic, attractive, and they are praised by the international media but *favela/rancho vertical* are neglected, rejected, or ignored by its local audiences- *Favelas* are an exceptional case which is considered a world heritage site by the UNESCO and it is also embraced by the local and public audience. European, african and asian have a general dislike towards *slums* and *bidonvilles* but Europeans still admire the Brazilian *favéla* and the Venezuelan *barrio vertical*. Because the four words -*bidonville*, *slums*, *favéla*, and *barrios* - are carelessly considered synonyms, this situation is a double standard, a contradiction, and a cause concern.

It is important to understand this situation to not continue with polarized visions. Fascination and ignorance will not help us understand the social reality these formations present not it will help us generate acceptable solutions to offer the actors of the city. Globalization of the poverty, especially in the South American continent, is becoming a worldwide general growing pattern of repetition, in both the horizontal and the vertical topography.

This study has facilitated the comprehension of these types of formations and how they are represented in different ways, and the uniformity of construction patterns that exists in their production around the world. The Global Report on Human Settlements by UN-Habitat says “By 2030, about 3 billion people, or about 40 per cent of the world’s population, will need proper housing and access to basic infrastructure and services such as water and sanitation systems”.

Like Pedrazzini says: *“The contemporary world is in its means of urban development, without anyone being able to say exactly where it is heading towards.”*

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