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STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBOURHOODS OF MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

Siła słabych więzi w ubogich osiedlach w Medellín, w Kolumbii

Abstract: The article links the quality of available public spaces and physical space composition with social capital. Colombian city - Medellín is chosen as this particular city has gone through a tremendous transformation and is rich with different kinds of an urban environment, including traditional low-income neighbourhoods as well as social housing in the form of blocks of flats.

The study discusses types of social capital that appear in neighbourhoods and points at the special importance of weak ties for the sense of security, comfort, and quality of life. The results also show that space composition can impact construction of social capital.

Key words: social capital, community, neighbourhood, *barrio*, sense of security, weak ties

INTRODUCTION

After a period of significant interest in network theories, focus on the information era, and research on globalization, academics' and politicians' eyes turn on the local and spatial again. The 'local' is supposed to be a response to shortcomings of the globalized world's anonymity, carelessness, pace, and demands. With the renaissance of place also the local communities receive a lot of attention and admiration for their capacity to self-organize and unite before unfavourable city planning (e.g. demolition of low-income class housing) or national administration, insufficient public services, or threat from organized crime. The asset that helps communities to successfully pursue their goals is the social capital, a resource that relies on interpersonal ties, norms, and trust. What is intuitively linked with efficient pursuance of community goals is the strong, 'bonding' type of social capital, related with strong social ties. There is research evidence that this claim is true (Lin et al. 1981; Light 1984; Putnam 2000). However many researchers also point to side-effects of the social capital and the need to develop also the weak ties (Gans 1966; Granovetter 1974; Portes 1998). The importance of dense weak ties is the hypothesis of this paper. The low-income neighbourhoods of Medellín, a Colombian city that went through dramatic transformation is the research object in this study. Safety and security have been important topics in this city which experienced an unprecedented peak of violence that persists in dwellers' memory of space (Riaño-Alcalá 2002; 2010). At the same time,

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significant investments in housing infrastructure and public spaces have been made. City governors believed in the healing power of well-developed public spaces under the city-planning philosophy called ‘social urbanism’ (Echeverri, Orsini 2010; Fajardo 2017). Inspired by their belief, the presented study investigates how physical space impacts the quality of life. Not by an assumption, but as a result of the analysis, the community and social relations are a link between satisfaction with an inhabited place and the physical organization of a neighbourhood.

In the beginning, the intertwined concepts of neighbourhood, community and social capital are explained with some referral to Latin-American realities. Then the setting of the study and results are presented.

NEIGHBOURHOOD – COMMUNITY – SOCIAL CAPITAL

Neighbourhood, community, and social capital – all the three concepts are frequently referred to especially in the last two decades, but of course, none of them is new. ‘The term [community] suggests many appealing features of human social relationships, says Steven Brint (2001, 1), ‘a sense of familiarity and safety, mutual concern and support, continuous loyalties, even the possibility of being appreciated for one’s full personality and contribution to group life rather than for narrower aspects of rank and achievement’. Analysing the history of the concept, Brint presents a scope of structural variables relevant for speaking about the community. These are, in short: dense social ties, active attachments to various institutions, ritual occasions that bring the community together and size (better smaller than larger). Following cultural (we could say, psychological) variables that refer to the community are: perceived similarity with the others and shared belief in social rules (Brint 2001). Despite many research projects that approach communities as deprived of the physical space (like elective communities, e.g. certain cinema genre lovers or music band followers), basic and most common research line sees the community as related and linked to a particular place.

The future and fate of a community rooted in a physical place had been questioned, as the network theories were being developed. Manuel Castells (2000[2007]) used to formulate a thesis, that the current, globalizing world is a world of flows – of communication networks and not specific, physical, and tangible locations (Lewicka 2012). Some academics used to claim that attachment to a place is characteristic for the poor social layer, while the rich ones – a metropolitan class – live their life detached from place and community (Jałowicki, Szczepański 2006). Richard Florida criticized Putnam for praising traditional neighbourhoods (Florida 2002 in: Lewicka 2012). However, there are numerous studies (Giuliani et al. 2003; Gustafson 2009; Wiśniewska 2019; Pollini 2005 in: Lewicka 2012) that confirm that the “death of place” has been announced too early (Lewicka, 2012). Even Richard Florida who would before announce detachment from the place, in his book ‘Who’s your city?’ (Florida 2008 in: Lewicka 2012) claims that place is one of the most important determinants in people’s life.

As Putnam puts it, ‘community’ is a ‘conceptual cousin’ of ‘social capital (Putnam 2000: 21). The community concept is an inevitable link between the social capital asset and neighbourhood understood as a particular territory and administrative part of the city.

Community is sometimes even used as a synonym of a neighbourhood, especially in languages, where the word: neighbourhood does not have a good translation. Nowadays ‘neighbourhood’ enjoys a plenitude of definitions as many that some claim that “there is no exact definition of what makes a neighbourhood (National Strategy Report, Social Exclusion Unit, England, 2001). Galster (2001), before enlisting some available definitions claims that:

‘Urban social scientists have treated ‘neighbourhood’ in much the same way as courts of law have treated pornography: as a term that is hard to define precisely, but everyone knows it when they see it. Yet, even a cursory survey of definitions in the literature reveals some crucial differences in what the implicit ‘it’ is.’ (Galster 2001, 2011).

Who undertakes the effort to formulate such a definition usually points at the territory, community, and a set of functional and emotional characteristics of the community (Instituto de la Vivienda, University of Chile, 2005). It is also worth looking at, due to the Spanish – language context of the study presented in this article – at the concept of *the barrio*, used in the Hispanic world. The Spanish word *barrio* is probably an even better expression to link the community with the place and express a very robust meaning with one concept. The word comes from the Arab *barri* (open country, the outside) and elaborations on formulating its definition also contributed significantly to the discussion about the interrelation of community and territory. Firstly it is mentioned (Patiño Villa 2015) that *the barrio* looked at from urban territory development is an endemic Latin-American form. Conceived with a traditional colonial checkerboard design, as the Latin-American cities went developing further the topography often did not allow to continue with rectangular streets composition. What more many new settlements emerged without proper planning and in an informal way. Most of them took shape of densely built self-construction housing, with ‘naturally’ assigned name and identity coming from a shared experience of pioneers inhabiting certain territory – an identity later passed to next generations who would take their *barrios* to a higher standard. In the definition of Merlin and Choay (1988): ‘*Barrio* is a part of the territory of a city, endowed with its physiognomy and characterized by the distinctive traces that give it a certain unity and individuality. In some particular cases, the name of the *barrio* may be given to an administrative division, but most of the time, the *barrio* is independent of any administrative boundary. The word *barrio* is still used to designate the community of the inhabitants of a part of the city.’ (Merlin, Choay, 1988, p. 723).

In the analysed case of chosen *barrios* of Medellín, some of them, like in the abovementioned definition are identical with the administrative division while others are not, with traditional boundaries and the territory very often confirmed by (mostly) democratic self – governmental institution of *Junta Accion Comunal* (Community Action Boards). JAC is a 3-year term unit with the president and board members who represent the community before the city institutions, facilitate achieving local community goals, and solve conflicts. They may engage in fund search, unite with other JAC and even cooperate with international units such as ONGs. In practice, the scope of given JAC influence/ command is the best indicator of how do the inhabitants perceive their *barrio*’s name, and borders. In the case of Colombian cities *barrio* can also become a political entity pursuing its goals with the use of political tools.

Certain renaissance of the *barrio* concept is also a result of administrative policies and politics which assign funds at this level. Especially in Latin-American countries, *barrio* has been recognized as a political subject (by the mean of before mentioned Community action Boards) as well as an object while addressing various social policies and programs (Tapia Barria 2015).

WHERE TO LOOK FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL

The asset that makes the neighbourhood and its community pursue their goals effectively could be called: social capital. Social capital has been usually considered as something positive, as the term ‘capital’ suggests. The links between social capital and economic wealth/ development have been proven (Bhandari, Yasunobu 2009) and as such it has become to be sought for, as a panacea to assure sustainable economic growth.

This concept has made an impressive career and re-entered the academic discussion with a handful of new studies and developments in the 90ties of the XX century (Portes 1998; Bhandari, Yasunobu 2009).

Those were the urban issues scientists and researchers in the 50s and the 60s (Seely, Sim, and Loosely 1958 or Jane Jacobs 1961) who were the first to refer to the term of social capital, after it had been a topic among the ‘fathers’ of sociology such as Marx, Durkheim, Simmel or Weber and before Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam brought it to the contemporary academic discussion (Bhandari, Yasunobu 2009).

Within the last two decades of keen interest in this term, many definitions have been developed, which usually embark three elements; social capital components, social capital as linked to group

membership, and functions linked to social capital. In major terms, it could be concluded, that the social capital is a resource that embarks trust, norms, and networks/ associations (in the definitions of Putnam et al. 1993; Fukuyama 1999; Woolcock, Narayan 2000; Knack, Stephen, and Philip Keefer, Ostrom, Grootaert, Christiaan among others), is based on relations/ relationships/ connections/ ties and enables / facilitates collective action. As compared with economic capital, social capital is characterized by the highly intangible character 'Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage' (Portes 1998, p. 8).

Social capital can be an asset of various social groups at different levels: a community, an organization, a region, or even a nation. Robert Putnam would see social capital as a feature of social organizations. In his approach, the networks, norms, and trust facilitate cooperation for the benefit of the collective "Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital" (Putnam 1993, p. 35–36) he wrote.

Studies and analyses of different cases of social capital in diverse parts of the world and at different scales (neighbourhood, institution, region, nation) led to the development of several social capital classifications, of which bonding/bridging/ linking social capital as well as weak/ strong ties classifications are useful for the article. 'Of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive)' admits Robert Putnam (2000, p. 22)

Bonding social capital is associated with narrower and dense social networks of people who strongly support each other. Meanwhile bridging social capital refers to links with the 'outside' of a given social network and serves to open for 'external assets and for information diffusion'. (ibid, p. 23) 'Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. (...) Nevertheless, under many circumstances, both bridging and bonding social capital can have powerfully positive social effects' (ibid, p. 24).

Another differentiation important for this paper is into strong and weak social ties, mostly developed by Mark Granovetter (1973), who took the network analysis as a point of departure. 'The strength of a tie is a (...) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.' (Granovetter 1973, p. 1361). While strong ties are related to affection, reciprocal help, and support and knowing a lot about the other person, the weak ties are more about the mobility of information, resources, and linking to broader communities (Bhandari, Yasunobu 2009). As such, the correspondence between bonding capital and strong ties, as well as bridging capital and weak ties is visible.

"Making the transition from bonding to bridging social capital may not necessarily lead to the positive outcomes envisaged by Putnam but rather reinforce existing social, economic and political inequality" (Leonard, 2004, p. 942) – but this assumes only the bridging is between the community and outside. Meanwhile, inside of the community, the bridges are also necessary which many pieces of research, pointing at internal differences (Leonard 2004; Gans 1973) also seem to confirm.

Numerous theories of social capital are strongly focused on access to some kind of resources, be it financial, political, information, etc. (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam et al. 1993; Burt 1997). The concept of social capital just as the 'community' and 'neighbourhood' are currently awaking a lot of interest: 'At present, the pendulum has swung back, and many authors are calling for stronger community networks and norm observance to re-establish social control. This may be desirable in many instances, but the downside of this function of social capital must also be kept in mind' (Portes 1998, p. 17).

Social capital, the community, and neighbourhood/ *barrio* concepts all suffer from time to time from excessive expectations and one-sided romantic perception which sees strength and density of social relations as solutions to many contemporary challenges. Some negative aspects of the social ties that contribute to social capital should be also considered.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE SOCIAL CAPITAL

While social capital has been recognized and praised for its positive effects even its most renowned theorists recognized its “dark side” (Portes 1998; Brint 2001). Putnam points at the social ties and corresponding norms usually benefit those, who are inside of this network but also have some external effects which can also be negative (Putnam 2000). ‘Indeed it is our sociological bias to see good things emerging out of sociability; bad things are more commonly associated with the behaviour of *homo economicus*’ (Portes 1998, p. 16) while there is evidence coming from research, that social capital may have negative impacts such as the exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms (ibid). What is more, seen as coherent and well-organized from the outside, a community may hide ‘internal inequalities’ (Leonard 2004).

Cutting off from the traditional approach, some academics (Brint 2001) admit, that simple division into *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* proposed by Toennies seems outdated as people in cities also form communities in most cases related with the closest inhabited area. As mentioned earlier, place attachment is quite universal need and component of human life. Research show (ibid), that the “community” feelings and phenomena such as the feeling of belonging, social relations, place attachment are not uniquely reserved for a village or small towns, while big cities dwellers are not so anonymous and disconnected as it used to be described in the classic works from Chicago school of Park or Wirth.

But what is more often omitted is city dwellers who live in communities in their neighbourhoods, with a certain amount of social capital also sometimes seek isolation, withdrawal, rest, and time for their individualist needs. The ‘academic class’, usually inhabitants of large cities and living occidental, individualist style of life often forget, that they share many needs with deprived, poor and marginalized neighbourhoods”, dwellers, who do not only live their community life struggling to achieve common goals. Despite decades passed, the picture brought by Jane Jacobs (1961) still seems to be valid.

‘And yet, if interesting, useful, and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual’s, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either’ (Jacobs 1961, 56) she used to say, speaking of one of New York neighbourhoods. Putnam (2000) cites de Tocqueville who, being an apostle of a community also recognized this need of withdrawal; ‘a calm and considered feeling which disposes of each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after himself’ (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* cited by Putnam 2000, p. 26)

As early as in the 60s, Gans was pointing at the importance of bridging social capital and risks related with the bonding one describing the difficulties they had (with his wife) to enter West End community, coherent and united one (as it seemed at a first glance). Eventually, they “were welcomed by one of our neighbours and became friends with them. As a result, they invited us to many of their evening gatherings and introduced us to other neighbours, relatives and friends... As time went on. .. other West Enders. .. introduced me to relatives and friends, although most of the social gatherings at which I participated were those of our first contact and their circle” (Gans 1966, p. 340–341) which illustrates well the including – excluding dynamics of bonding social capital. Mark Granovetter (1973) makes use of this example arguing, that weak ties are owners of the ‘bridging capital,’ which can link more people than bonds of friendship. The author’s original study shows that weak ties can significantly contribute to an individual career and are called ‘a resource’. On the other hand, ‘Seen from a more macroscopic vantage, weak ties play a role in effecting social cohesion’ (Granovetter 1973, p. 1373). Granovetter uses the example of the Italian community of the West of Boston explored by Herbert Gans (from the cite above). The community described by Gans, although rich in many circles of friends, was unable to unite effectively against the ‘urban renewal’ that finally led to destruction of this sector (Granovetter 1973).

Other confused perceptions of communities, seen from the upper class refer to a self – organization under the circumstance of insufficient public services, “Conservative government embraced the notion of ‘community care’. Drawing on rosy images of supportive community networks and family relationships enabled policy-makers to move from expensive care in the community to cheap care by the community, in the process exploiting women’s unpaid, taken-for-granted roles in society and furthering the neglect of those excluded from such networks. Hence, the concept of ‘community, like ‘social capital is based on networks of inclusion and exclusion. (...) Therefore, social capital emanates from a very shaky foundation that romanticizes ‘the world we have lost’ and ignores the downside of community life’ (Leonard 2004, p. 929).

Social capital and community ‘values’ are seen as of special importance in deprived neighbourhoods. It must not be forgotten though, that social capital does not replace (and should not replace) medical services, educational institutions, or security institutions. Dwellers of such low-income communities should not be ascribed different needs than any other social classes have; they have collective as well as individual goals and strive not only for basic survival but also personal development and emancipation.

THE MOST VIOLENT CITY IN THE WORLD

The data presented further in this paper were collected during the fieldwork in Medellín – a Colombian city (Fig. 1) that has become famous due to the innovativeness of the introduced spatial changes at the beginning of the XXI century. Medellín was the winner of many prizes including the Most Innovative City in 2013 (Drummond et al. 2012; Ferrari et al. 2017). This second-largest city in Colombia, located in the Western Andes was founded in 1616 by the Spaniards. Medellín’s political importance increased with moving the administration of Antioquia state there in 1826. The coffee boom in the twentieth century brought Colombia closer to the global economy (Palacios 2002; Ferrari et al. 2017) and the city has started to develop dynamically. The crisis in the 70s and unemployment at a large scale fuelled the growth of illegal drug business, which in the 1980s led to a war of “everyone with everyone”, precisely the drug cartels, leftist guerrillas, rightist paramilitary troops, ordinary gangs, and the legitimate state forces which made Medellín the most dangerous city in the world in 1991. The situation started improving in 1993 – the death of Pablo Escobar. The problem of poverty, bad living conditions, and inequalities in life chances remain. From the beginning of the 21st century, the transformation of Medellín started with a special focus on the spatial aspect, in the spirit of the so-called, social urbanism. Improving the image of the city was almost equally important so a broad image campaign was carried at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (McLean 2014; Martin 2014; Sotomayor 2015; Reimerink 2017).

The topography of Medellín as well as its spatial development has contributed significantly to the city’s social structure development and the emergence of inequalities within it. Rural population flowing into the metropolis would settle mainly in its peripheral areas, often on steep slopes, crossed by ravines where they couldn’t find decent living conditions. Not only topography and geographical distance but also the way of investing in urban infrastructure deepened already existing dramatic social differences, poverty, and marginalization of poorer city residents. ‘For example, highways were built to allow residents of richer southern districts to avoid districts of informal construction in the north’ (Maclean 2014, p. 16). The details of this kind of unjust policy are not much talked about today, they are closed in the term ‘social debt’, which Sergio Fajardo – the mayor of Medellín and the symbol of the beginning of the transformation path in this city – decided to pay off. ‘Social debt’ often also refers to the fact that poor informal settlements were considered non-existent for many years because they ‘did not exist’ formally (Drummond, Dizgun, Keeling 2012). Fajardo also placed great emphasis on the public space, which was supposed to be beautiful, accessible, and vibrant.

In a city like Medellín, public spaces making has also symbolic, but clear to every inhabitant meaning: in the years in which the drug-related civil war was gathering the bloodiest harvest, the inhabitants

remained closed inside of their own homes. Drug cartels, paramilitary organizations operating in the city as well as ordinary gangs divided the territory (mainly in poor districts) marking borders of their rule. This has led to a decrease in trust between people and the conversion of public space into the arena of regular military operations. The places that persist over time remain witnesses of the violent period which left so many victims and marked experience of all dwellers (Riaño-Alcalá 2002, 2010). Sergio Fajardo dreamed that people would leave their homes again, move freely, look for a job, go to school and spend time with their neighbours. In his reforms, he was guided by the principle of ‘the poorest people to the most beautiful places’ and real, serious investments in the marginalized areas of the city followed this idea. The imagery and symbolic success of these transformations are unquestionable; Medellín has become a laboratory and a textbook for many other cities struggling with the problem of violence, poverty, and inequality (Giraldo-Ramírez, Preciado-Restrepo 2015). Only very recently has how changes have been introduced received some criticism; it is claimed to be very technocratic (Maclean 2017), more symbolic than actually effective (Drummond, Dizgun, Keeling 2012; Reimerink 2017) or lacking in authentic and down – top dwellers’ participation (Reimerink 2017).

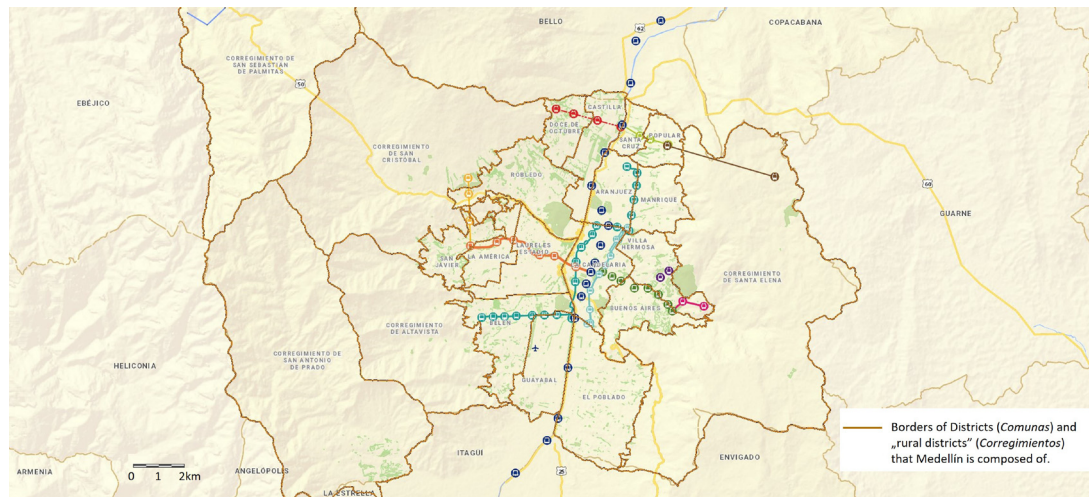


Fig. 1. Administrative division of Medellín with main public transport axes

Ryc. 1. Podział administracyjny Medellín z głównymi osiami komunikacji miejskiej
Source/Źródło: https://www.Medellín.gov.co/MAPGISV5_WEB/mapa.jsp?aplicacion=0

ISVIMED – Social Institute for Housing and Habitat in Medellín has been one of the important actors of change in this city. ISVIMED is a city – institution in charge of the whole process of building and distribution of the social housing in Medellín. They search for the proper territories, administrate its purchase, contract the developers and supervise the construction. Its representatives also organize the adaptation process and tutorial for the newcomers. This institution is also an intermediate in the process of displacement of groups of inhabitants from the zones of construction or high geological risk. Not only the new social housing but also improvement of the already inhabited informal settlement is the job of this organism; they finance repairs and help in formal procedures to obtain legal status. Yet the most visible effect of their activity is vast groups of blocks of flats marking Medellín’s landscape, located usually in the urban peripheries.

METHODOLOGY

The analyses presented in continuation aim to fuel the discussion on the relationship between social capital in the inhabited neighbourhood and satisfaction with this place. The objective is to contribute to an understanding of how social capital is created and how it works in the urban environment of local communities – and how space organization might contribute to the creation of this

asset.

The material included in the analysis includes:

- Tracking quantitative survey carried out among city residents: ‘Medellín, ¿Como Vamos?’ (see: <https://www.Medellincomovamos.org/>) Medellíncomovamos.org. The analysed data comes from 3 years: 2013–2015 which sums up to the sample of approximately 4500 interviews.
- Own quantitative survey was conducted in selected areas of Medellín from March to June 2017. The collected sample of 264 interviews represents social layer (estrato) 1: 83% and layer 2: 14% of the sample, so the two poorest social strata. Furthermore; 1/4 of this sample comes from social housing, while the rest are from traditional neighbourhoods. This distinction is an important independent variable in this article,
- Qualitative research was carried out in the same period and observations. The main qualitative study embarked on 35 semi-structured interviews.
- Systematic observations run in 8 places/neighbourhoods in the first half of 2019. The observations included a detailed track of all dwellers that appear in a given place, their socio-demographic characteristics, types of behaviours, and composition of groups.

All interviews and observations from the author’s original study are based on the following locations; district 8 (Comuna 8), district 7 (Comuna 7), district 13 (Comuna 13) and municipality of San Cristobal (for social housing) (Fig. 2).

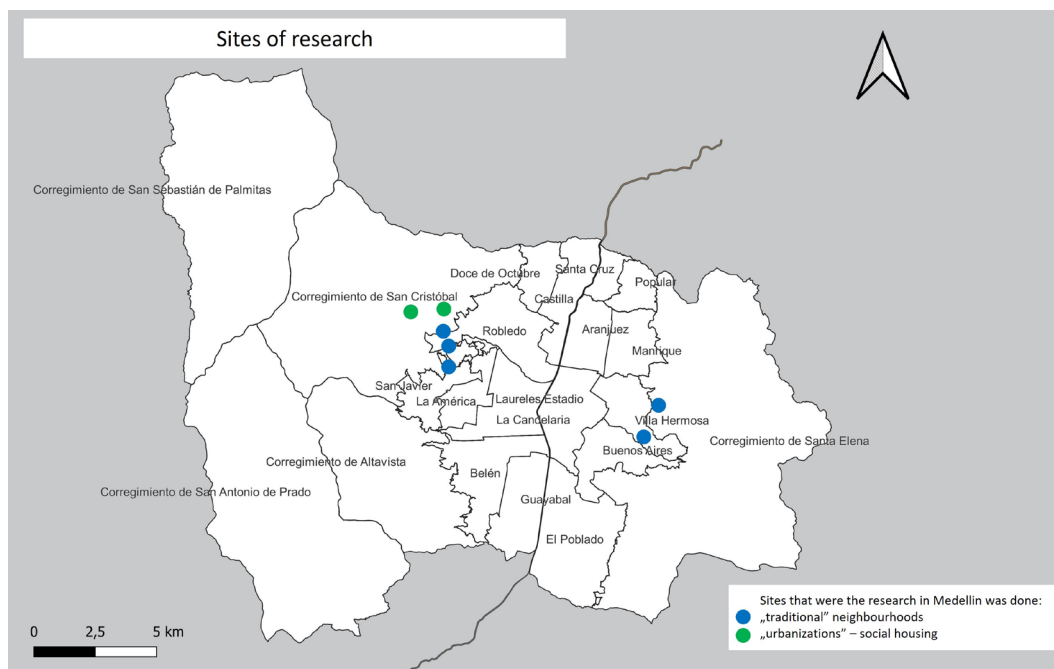


Fig. 2. Sites in which the interviews were collected in Medellín

Source: Own elaboration

Ryc. 2. Miejsca, w których zbierane były wywiady w Medellín
Źródło: opracowanie własne

The specific research questions concern different forms of social capital that may be found in marginalized neighbourhoods of Medellín and relate to possible impact of impressive urban transformation, that the city of Medellín went through, on the social ties.

1. Following to the discussion and the importance of social capital, the study aims to see: are the social relations in the neighbourhood an important factor of satisfaction with the place one lives in? How it relates to other – tangible and intangible characteristics of the inhabited place? This question aims to position the social capital among other characteristics of built and social

environment in the neighbourhood.

2. The social capital has different “faces” and as a model it has been divided into bonding and bridging, or – closer to common language – strong and weak ties. The question is: what kind of ties – strong or weak prevail in the poor neighbourhoods? Is there any difference between the type of social capital in the “traditional” neighbourhoods, which usually have informal provenience and modern “urbanizations” of social housing?
3. Given the social capital is important, does it depend on how the space around is organized? This topic has been rarely raised in the studies on social ties. Can any relation between the type of social capital and type of built environment be observed? An attempt to find the answer this question will be based on qualitative techniques used in the research.

WEAK TIES AND SPACE IN NEIGHBOURHOODS OF MEDELLÍN

Even though the city transformation took as the objective an improvement of physical infrastructure and public spaces what is crucial for the satisfaction of living in a certain neighbourhood is less tangible than a park or football pitch. Among various factors that impact satisfaction with the inhabited place, security in the neighbourhood is the strongest driver (table 1).

This can be specific for Medellín or Colombian cities, but cannot be omitted in spatial planning; investment in urban green, public parks, local roads, or streetlights might be desired and well-received but no investment can compensate for the factor of security. The official and year-to-year conducted study has not included the ‘human’ factor which could help to explore the importance of social capital for satisfaction with the inhabited place.

The author’s quantitative study did include a variety of factors that could hypothetically impact satisfaction with an inhabited area. This study confirms the high importance of a sense of security. What’s more the aesthetics, options to spend free time, and also neighbours are important for satisfaction with one’s neighbourhood (table 2). This is an evidence, that either physical environment may be easier to shape, social relations are also strong driver in evaluating the place one lives in.

In order to investigate the type of relationship more, the respondents were asked about how they would define the type of bonds in their neighbourhood.

The types of bonds that can link neighbours were derived from a qualitative study in poor neighbourhoods and put into the answer list the respondents could thereafter choose those statements that describe the type of relations in their neighbourhood best. Furthermore, the available options also aimed at representing various types of social bonds – stronger and weaker, in order to answer the question about possible differences in types of relationships across different neighbourhoods and dwelling types.

The options available were:

- We know each other well
- We undertake a lot of activities together, we trust in each other
- I like to spend time with them
- I can count on them
- We know each other, but we don’t undertake any actions together
- There are no conflicts between us, but we don’t know each well
- I don’t know anything about my neighbours nor other people who live in this neighbourhood
- I don’t like them
- I am afraid of them
- I like some and dislike others
- There are conflicts
- I don’t have any relationships/there are no relationships here

Interestingly, the most popular answers were: “we know each other, but we don’t undertake any

actions together” (46%) and “there are no conflicts between us, but we don’t know each well” (42%) (table 3a). This results shows that indeed the often shared image of marginal districts where strong ties prevail, is false. The figures obtained were also supported with qualitative observations, in which the family ties and bonds between household members are strong while relations with neighbors – mostly friendly but at a distance.

Yet, it is also worth noticing, that strong bonds are important for the sense of security: “we know each other well” and “I can count on them” (table 3) especially.

But among the drivers of sense of security, the negative ones are stronger: there is a significant negative impact of “I don’t know anything about them” and “I am afraid of them”, “there are conflicts”.

This all points to the special importance of the possibility of dwellers to recognize and at least superficially know their neighbours rather than have strong bonds with them. The other way around; lack of recognition of people living in the neighbourhood may result in a decrease of satisfaction with it. The qualitative study also confirms appreciation of being familiar and well oriented in who lives in the neighbourhood, yet without excessive involvement in the community life that could invade one’s household and disturb privacy. ‘*Yo no me meto con nadie, nadie se mete conmigo*’ (‘I don’t bother anybody, nobody bothers me’) approach was most common and this phrase was frequently repeated. It can be interpreted in the context of Medellín’s issues with security as a strategy to stay alert and informed about who is the dweller (does not bring any danger) and who is a ‘guest’ (potentially a threat) in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, limiting closer contacts with others than family members or close friends can be understood as making sure one is not establishing a relationship with criminal band members, who are also dwellers in these communities. Even if this is the case sometimes it does not undermine the general importance of weak ties for the comfort of life in the neighbourhood.

NEW SPACES, OLD SPACES, AND BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The study included two types of housing: traditional neighbourhoods (*barrios*) and social housing settlements, called urbanizations (*urbanizaciones*). It needs to be stressed here, that the social composition in the two types of settlements is not dramatically different; social housing dwellers are mostly composed of low-income neighbourhood dwellers that were outplaced from their previous houses due to public works or high geological risk. Many of them are displaced from other parts of Antioquia region but a great majority of them represent the condition of the lowest social layer in urban Colombia, namely *estrato 1*.

In order to see if there is any relation between the type of social capital and type of built environment, this division into the traditional neighbourhoods (*barrios*) and social housing settlements (*urbanizaciones*) was introduced, as an independent variable. Here are the observations: two types of social ties: “we know each other, but we don’t undertake any actions together” and “there are no conflicts between us, but we don’t know each well” are most common in both types of settlement although in urbanizations of social housing there are more inhabitants who don’t know anything about other people, do not maintain contacts with others (table 4).

This can be explained by the average time lived in a particular place: for traditional neighbourhoods, it is much longer (on average 16 years) than in the social housing (2,7 years on average). However, the qualitative inquiry and observations allowed to shed more light on the question: how does the type of built environment impact social relations? This part of the study revealed some significant differences in the organization of space of these two types of settlements.

In the popular – traditional neighbourhoods, there used to be much more freedom in the construction of space, or other words, place-making was natural and spontaneous. Initially, this was because informal settlements were neglected or treated as non-existent. But as the observations show in such traditional popular neighbourhoods there is a good variety of public spaces of various scales. They

are not necessarily beautiful and neat public parks (in most cases they are not), but small places grew around a small cafe, a bar or a store, or a small bench behind a tree. These are places where people easily pass from ‘necessary’ activities to ‘optional’, and ‘social activities’ (Gehl 2010 [2014]). The places where people learn others’ faces and, with time also their names. Where they spend as much or as little (with the special focus on ‘as little’) time they want and can withdraw easily. This kind of public space without a redundant pump allows people to build more and more weak ties.

As early as in the 60s Jane Jacobs made her observation:

‘The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eying the girls while waiting to be called for a dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies and sympathizing over the way a coat faded. (...) Most of it is ostensibly, utterly trivial, but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level – most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone – is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighbourhood need. The absence of this trust is a disaster to a city street. Its cultivation cannot be institutionalized. And above all, it implies no private commitments’ (Jacobs 1961, p. 56).

In the social housing provided by ISVIMED the type of space organization and regulations do not leave much freedom for spontaneous place-making. A parking lot is used when a bigger gathering takes place, but there are no small shops, cafes, or numerous points of various services (actually some shops and services are offered inside of people’s apartments). As a result, people who still seek social bonds are more likely to move social life to the inside of their apartments. This however is less comfortable – home is usually where we invite people with whom we have closer bond – and in the long-term limits the number of social ties to a couple of neighbours that become friends. In this particular case of social housing bonding, social capital seems to be forcing out the bridging social capital and this process is strongly reinforced by the type of the material environment around. Circles of close friends end up surrounded by unfriendly or in the best case unknown ‘rest of people’. As a result social housing indeed sees more conflicts than traditional neighbourhoods. Most of them are typical interpersonal disputes but in mass, they impact the quality of life. What’s more the systematic observation of traditional *barrios* and social housing urbanizations also confirm, that the latter is much less vivid and lively (table 5).

The systematic observation was run in 15-minute slots, for each time – slot there were 2 measurements done (the value presented is the average from 2 measurements). The presented example contrasts the 2 chosen centralities of social housing urbanization (*Tirol 2*) and traditional *barrio* (*Sol de Oriente*), home to a similar number of families (around 500 each). Traditional *barrio* is visited by many more people spending their time outside. The same is confirmed by declarations in the quantitative study – traditional *barrios* dwellers tend to go more outside, while social housing urbanizations dwellers are more likely to remain closed in their apartments or they leave their urbanization (table 6).

During the visit to the same social housing in 2019, some of the dwellers complained, that due to lack of public spaces and options of spending free time some adolescents fell into ‘bad company’ and got involved in delinquent activities. As a consequence and particularly for this reason some families moved out. Also, some bottom-up efforts to create public spaces are noticeable (Photo 1) which on one hand prove how important such places are for the communities and on the other: how difficult it is to create them in an urban environment arbitrarily planned where social bonds making function had not been taken into consideration.



Photo 1. ‘Ranchito’, a mix of garden and a shelter self-constructed by inhabitants of social housing dwellers to create a public space for spontaneous and non-committal gatherings.

Source: author’s photo

Fot. 1. „Ranchito”, połączenie ogrodu i wiaty samodzielnie skonstruowane przez mieszkańców mieszkań socjalnych w celu stworzenia przestrzeni publicznej do spontanicznych i niezobowiązujących spotkań

Źródło: fotografia autorska

CONCLUSIONS

Given high interest in the topic of the social capital and its importance for communities, the study was aimed at answering the question about the actual meaning of it among the marginalized settlements of Medellín. This question came from the fact, that the famous transformation of the city was strongly focused on material aspects of *barrio*, which are important, but not exhaustive for overall satisfaction with the inhabited place, which the presented study confirms. Satisfaction with neighbours drives security and impacts overall happiness with the inhabited place. The community is the essence of a neighbourhood which is worth repeating in the context of the paternalistic approach of governors, architects, and urbanists who aim at improving quality of life from the bird’s-eye perspective (Gehl 2010 [2014]). It is more challenging to address social capital directly by city policies, but it is worth at least measuring and tracking.

Unlike some romantic interpretations of what community is may point at, the type of bonds that prevails in poor neighbourhoods more often points at weak ties. Moreover, the situation which has the strongest impact on the sense of security in the inhabited place is – in negative way – not knowing anybody around. We could conclude then, that numerous weak ties are important also in other – quite rarely raised – aspect of sense of security in the inhabited place.

A situation where the basic and weakest ties (recognizing faces around, knowing who the neighbours are) are missing, is the most common in the blocks of social housing. This observation can also contribute to overall discussion of the impact of the city’s transformation. Large districts of newly developed social housing are one of the elements of it. Yes, these blocks of flats which serve as a social housing are home to many of displaced Colombians that come to Medellín seeking shelter, but also to a number of city inhabitants whose previous houses had stood in the way of new building or element of modern infrastructure.

Fewer relations in the social housing is on one hand a result of relatively little time lived in the settlement, but on the other hand the study provides with examples of how the physical organization of space impedes creating numerous weak ties.

Observations and qualitative inquiry reveal, that many and available public spaces of different scales enable short and easy-to-close interactions which are birth to weak ties. The example of social housing in Medellín was a case of how certain types of spatial organization may lead to the creation of strong ties and bonding social capital which has the dynamics of pushing out the weak ties and bridging social capital. This learning could fuel the discussion – present in academic debate – about the nature of those two types of social capital and enrich them with a spatial component.

Currently, the North – American NGO – Project for Public Spaces gains more and more hearing when speaking about bottom-up and easily transformable public spaces. Such public spaces do not require huge investments but can be adjusted easily to the need of the moment. The importance of such activities should be linked with the emergence, retention, and multiplication of bridging social capital deposited in weak ties.

The findings of the presented study are of course case-specific and may be valid only for the given context. In case of Medellín this context is quite special situation in terms of security, history and the transformation.

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Table 3a. Social relationships in the neighborhood. Source: own analysis based on the own study of the author**Tabela 3a.** Relacje społeczne w sąsiedztwie. Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań własnych autora

Which of the following statements fit the relationship between people living in your neighborhood? Multiple answers can be selected	
	% of answers
We know each other, but we don't undertake any actions together	46%
There are no conflicts between us, but we don't know each well	42%
I can count on them	26%
I like to spend time with them	22%
We know each other well	21%
I don't know anything about my neighbors nor other people who live in this neighborhood	17%
We undertake a lot of activities together, we trust in each other	13%
I don't have any relationships/there are no relationships here	6%
There are conflicts	5%
I don't like them	4%
I like some and dislike others	3%
I am afraid of them	2%
Base	255

Table 3. Impact of social relationships in the neighborhood on a sense of security. Source: own analysis based on the own study of the author**Tabela 3.** Wpływ relacji społecznych w sąsiedztwie na poczucie bezpieczeństwa. Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań własnych autora

Sense of security in the inhabited neighborhood: evaluation on 1 – 5 scale, recoded to 3 values: negative, neutral, positive, and its dependence on the type of relationship between neighbors								
Independent variables (below):	Dependent variable: a sense of security in the inhabited neighborhood				Chi-square Pearson			Statistically dependent (yes/no)
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	Value	df	Sig. (two-sided.)	
We know each other well	11%	10%	26%	21%	7.783	2	0,02	yes
We undertake a lot of activities together, we trust in each other	9%	10%	16%	14%	2.248	2	0,32	no
I like to spend time with them	11%	15%	25%	22%	5.072	2	0,08	no
I can count on them	9%	20%	32%	27%	8.779	2	0,01	yes
We know each other, but we don't undertake any actions together	44%	35%	49%	46%	2.921	2	0,23	no
There are no conflicts between us, but we don't know each well	29%	47%	43%	42%	2.767	2	0,25	no
I don't know anything about my neighbors nor other people who live in this neighborhood	32%	27%	12%	18%	11.401	2	0,00	yes
I don't like them	3%	4%	5%	5%	0.326	2	0,85	no
I am afraid of them	12%	2%	1%	3%	12.353	2	0,00	yes
I like some and dislike others	6%	2%	3%	3%	1.013	2	0,60	no
There are conflicts	24%	2%	1%	4%	35.867	2	0,00	yes
I don't have any relationships/there are no relationships here	6%	13%	3%	5%	6.160	2	0,05	yes
Base	27	51	181	259				

Table 4. Frequencies of social relationships in the neighborhood by different types of the neighborhood. Source: own analysis based on the own study of the author

Tabela 4. Częstość występowania relacji społecznych według różnych typów osiedli. Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań własnych autora

Relations in the neighborhood compared: in the traditional barrios and social housing							
	Traditional neighborhood (<i>barrio</i>)	Social housing (<i>urbanización</i>)	Total	Chi-square Pearson			Statistically dependent (yes/no)
				Value	df	Sig. (two-sided.)	
We know each other well	29	10	24	9.905a	1	0,002	yes
We undertake a lot of activities together, we trust in each other	17	7	14	4.052a	1	0,044	yes
I like to spend time with them	26	14	23	3.702a	1	0,054	no
I can count on them	30	17	26	4.202a	1	0,04	yes
We know each other, but we don't undertake any actions together	45	40	44	0.563a	1	0,453	no
There are no conflicts between us, but we don't know each well	40	46	42	0.712a	1	0,399	no
I don't know anything about my neighbors nor other people who live in this neighborhood	10	31	16	17.350a	1	0	yes
I don't like them	5	-	4	3.874a	1	0,049	yes
I am afraid of them	2	3	2	0.119a	1	0,73	no
I like some, and dislike others	3	6	4	1.414a	1	0,234	no
There are conflicts	1	14	4	23.639a	1	0	yes
I don't have any relationships/there are no relationships here	1	16	5	22.881a	1	0	yes
Base (number of interviews)	188	70	265				

Table 5. Average number of people appearing in a given place (central place for the neighborhood) in a 15 - minute slot

Tabela 5. Średnia liczba osób pojawiających się w danym miejscu (miejsce centralne dla sąsiedztwa) w 15-minutowym slotcie

	Weekday, hrs: 8-11	Weekday, hrs: 12-14	Weekday, hrs: 15-18	Saturday after 12	Sunday after 12
Social housing (Tirol 2)	25	33	35	74	65
'Traditional' neighborhood (Sol de Oriente)	54	62	67	52	115

Table 6. Frequencies, place where dwellers spend their free time during weekdays and weekends, by the type of settlements: traditional neighborhood and social housing**Tabela 6.** Częstotliwość spędzania czasu wolnego przez mieszkańców w dni powszednie i weekendy w różnych miejscach, według rodzaju osiedla: tradycyjnego i budownictwa socjalnego

Question: Where do you spend most of your free time during the week?		
	Traditional neighborhood (<i>barrio</i>)	Social housing
At home	60,6%	65,7%
Outside of the home, but in the neighborhood	24,5%	14,3%
Outside of the home, in various places, outside of my neighborhood	10,6%	20,0%
Other situation	4,3%	0,0%
Base: (number of interviews)	188	70
Chi-square: 9,019, df: 3, sig. 0,029		
Question: Where do you spend most of your free time during the weekend?		
	Traditional neighborhood (<i>barrio</i>)	Social housing
At home	38,8%	40,0%
Outside of the home, but in the neighborhood	27,1%	12,9%
Outside of the home, in various places, outside of my neighborhood	29,8%	42,9%
Other situation	4,3%	4,3%
Base: (number of interviews)	188	70
Chi-square: 7,099, df: 3, sig. 0,069		