

Psychotropic territories in the center of Porto Alegre city, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Territórios psicotrópicos na região central da cidade de Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

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Abstract

This article is the result of research based on the human and social sciences aiming to understand the everyday life of crack users in the center of Porto Alegre city. Participant observations and informal interviews were conducted to characterize users, the forms and effects of drug use, the disease and health process in their daily life and their survival strategies. The daily life of the place studied is connected to the history of degradation of the city's central area, currently marked by attempts to control and arrange the urban space. Most users were males, lived on the streets, had transmitted diseases and a compulsive pattern of crack use linked to the economic and social precariousness of their lives, although crack users have been observed who are capable of controlling their relationship with the drug, employing strategies of self-control and survival.

Keywords: Use of Crack; Ethnographic; Public Health.

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Resumo

Este artigo é resultado de uma investigação que, com base no campo das ciências humanas e sociais aplicadas à saúde, visou compreender o cotidiano de usuários de crack na região central da cidade de Porto Alegre. Foram realizadas observações participantes e entrevistas informais para caracterizar os usuários, as formas e efeitos do uso de drogas, o processo saúde-doença em seu cotidiano e suas estratégias de sobrevivência. O cotidiano do local pesquisado liga-se à história de degradação da região central da cidade, marcada atualmente por tentativas de controle e ordenação do espaço urbano. A maioria dos usuários era do sexo masculino, estava em situação de rua, apresentava doenças transmissíveis e um padrão de uso compulsivo de crack, que se articulavam à precariedade econômica e social de suas vidas, embora tenham sido observados usuários capazes de controlar sua relação com o uso de substâncias psicoativas, empregando estratégias de autocontrole e de sobrevivência.

Palavras-chave: Crack; Etnografia; Saúde Pública

Introduction

Since its appearance in Brazil, great emphasis has been placed on crack by the media with the emergence of *Cracolândia*, located in downtown São Paulo city, close to historic buildings and busy commercial streets. Nationally infamous for its concentration of crack users and dealers, the region has been the subject of several studies (Adorno e col., 2013; Raupp and Adorno, 2011, 2010; Oliveira, 2007; Domânico, 2006).

Two decades after crack was introduced into Brazil and, consequently, into São Paulo city - the first city in which it was recorded- *Cracolândia* remains the scene of confrontations and the focus of processes in which health policies, aiming at compulsorily expelling and institutionalizing users, are aligned with other forces such as real estate speculation and political issues, as a line of action with which to control those who should no longer occupy those places (Adorno and Silva, 2013).

Following the nationwide use and sale of crack, the term *Cracolândia* became generalized to denote areas in other Brazilian cities in which crack was used in public. According to Adorno (2013), the process of popularizing the term *Cracolândia* reflects a lack of consideration of the historical issues and economic, urban and social peculiarities of each place and, rather than denouncing the urban and social degradation of Brazilian cities, focuses the problem on the drug and its users. Moreover, it works to reinforce stigmatizing representations and to worsen the socialization conditions of the groups historically present in such spaces, such as the homeless, beggars and sex workers, who end up having their images linked with those of crack users (Cavalcanti and Frúgoli Jr., 2013).

Bearing these point in mind, this study looks at the issue of the use and circulation of crack in the central region of the city of Porto Alegre, aiming to link this to the history and dynamics of the region. The aim, therefore, is to avoid stagnant understandings and generalizations so common in the area of studying drugs and which view the phenomenon of drug use as homogenous, putting the emphasis on the subject and excluding social, contextual and individual variables.

This study forms part of doctoral research describing the paths of crack use in the downtown areas of two Brazilian state capitals: São Paulo, SP and Porto Alegre, RS. This text focuses on data from the research in the latter city given its characteristics and dynamics, although reference will also be made to the analyses conducted in São Paulo to draw parallels with the observations from Porto Alegre. Aspects such as characterizing users, the health/disease relationship and the self-care and self-control practices in crack use will be highlighted, as will the form of crack use, its effects and users' survival strategies.

When seeking to outline the characteristics and dynamics of the context studied, the notion of psychotropic territories (Fernandes, 1998; Fernandes and Pinto, 2004) yields important clues for understanding the space of exclusion in question. This notion takes into consideration that analyzing the psychological, social and biological dimensions of the drug phenomenon should also include analysis of the space in which these practices take place (Fernandes, 1998; Fernandes and Pinto, 2004). A psychotropic territory is a place in which activities linked to drug using and dealing are carried out, being spatially and socially on the margins of the normalized city and often linked to areas of social exclusion, frequently the target of police repression and social stigma (Fernandes and Ramos, 2010).

An ethnographic method was used for the "participant observation" in the territory studied, occurring over a period of six months accompanying the work of a team working on the streets at that time, part of the Family Health Strategy (FHS), responsible for the processes of promotion, prevention and health care of those living on the streets in and around the region studied. The team was formed of a doctor, nurse and nursing assistant and three community health workers (CHWs), who approached those living on the street. Field trips with the CHWs and other FHS professionals only happened during the day, once or twice a week, according to the team's availability to allow the researchers' presence. The field trips were alternated with independent trips to the place in question aiming to observe local activities and/or interacting with regulars there. The data were analyzed based on understanding, elaborating

and systemizing the field diary records. Extracts from the field diary are included throughout this article to give a better idea of the data. All names used are fictitious in order to protect identities.

By encouraging the researcher's immersion in the field, ethnography in the Public Health field makes it possible to read life styles and living conditions based on the intersecting views of the researchers and the subjects in question. According to Adorno et al (2013), ethnography is an ideal method for better understanding urban territories in which legal and illegal agencies are mixed, as in the case of the territories in which crack is sold and consumed, facilitating the capture of meanings that can only be learned contextually.

Downtown Porto Alegre: history and present day

Downtown Porto Alegre is closely linked to the city's history, with some vectors of evolution and modern day contrasts standing out. In order to understand why crack users congregate in this region, it is necessary to give a brief historical overview of the area.

According to Pesavento (1999), the streets in the center were planned so as to praise modernity and welcome the higher classes. The most important road, around which the city expanded, *Rua dos Andradas*, was, in the early 19th century, the only commercial street, with an accelerated rhythm for those times, serving as a meeting point for intellectuals, artists and politicians (Flores, 2005). Towards the end of the 19th century, going against government intentions, there was a popularizing movement in the area with the appearance of so called enclaves, areas thus denominated by the presence of housing for those on low incomes mostly descended from slaves (Pesavento, 1999).

In the early 20th century, urban interventions, inspired by hygienist ideas, were undertaken in order to alter the urban landscape and expel undesirable inhabitants to the outskirts (Ruschel, 2004). During this time, there was a considerable increase in the population and in industrialization, contributing to urban plans drawn up to modernize the city (Ruschel, 2004) and increase access—resulting in the construction of an avenue central to this research,

Avenida Farrapos, opened in 1940 s a symbol of modernization, represented by its *Art Déco* style buildings (Ruschel, 2004).

Thirty years after its opening this avenue presented a very different face, becoming a noisy, degraded and devalued area. Many buildings housed brothels or cheap hotels, intensifying the prostitution that already existed in the former industrial zone. Currently, little value is placed on the area due to the existence of sex workers, nightclubs, drug dealing and crime.

Parallel to *Avenida Farrapos* is another important avenue for this study, *Avenida Voluntários da Pátria* - equally socially stigmatized. Historically located along the shore of the Guaíba river, it underwent major changes in the early 20th century that transformed it into a street of wholesalers and industries. It is also a place in which sex workers and the homeless congregate as there are social care facilities there to provide shelter and attend this public. Another aspect of this landscape that stand out is the presence of various establishments linked to recycling activities, forming a circuit that includes warehouses, cooperatives and factories. This is such a significant activity there that throughout the 1980s a collection of illegal shacks were built there which became known as the Vila dos Papeleiros (*paperworkers*) - nowadays the Santa Terezinha settlement - , given the centrality of recycling activities for the residents there. The housing development is present on the city's 'map of fear' due to associations with poverty, garbage and illegal activities, especially drug dealing, as shown in the following extract:

Drug dealing and drug consumption, fights and assaults. This is the daily routine for the residents and business owners in *Rua Comendador Azevedo*, in downtown Porto Alegre [...] Everything that happens on the block between *Avenida Farrapos* and *Avenida Voluntários da Pátria* is controlled by the drug lords in the Vila Santa Teresinha settlement (former-Papeleiros). There is an intense traffic of "aviõezinhos" runner, mostly adolescents, who transport the drug. Those who work on Comendador Azevedo are afraid to walk down the street. (Poyastro, 2009)

The settlement occupies a strategic location for the sale and use of drugs in the region, in reference to what Fernandes and Pinto (2004) say about psychotropic territories being places marked by substantial economic fragility. In early 2009, the Santa Terezinha settlement was the target of a police operation aiming to limit drug dealing, a response to media pressure. There were immediate changes, with locations where users congregated and surrounding areas being cleared. However within a few weeks of the police operation new routes of drug dealing appeared nearby. According to

Fernandes and Ramos (2010) psychotropic territories are constantly changing and shifting: "[...] the geography, the actors and the stage all change, but the activity remains the same" (p. 25).

Entering the field: way of approaching and characterizing users

The field trips accompanied by the FHS workers covered areas where crack users congregate, such as the regions close to the bus station, the Santa Terezinha settlement and, above all, the area surrounding the Municipal Hostel, where the homeless often congregate. Through observations and conversations in the field, it was possible to discover the characteristics of the population in question, summing together information from the CHWs, two of whom had been homeless and knew the local reality "up close and personally".

It was thus found that the vast majority of users in this territory were homeless and made use of the municipal hostel or of other facilities for this population, located nearby. There were also several people who passed through the region due to their recycling activities, coming from the settlement next door or from others located in the downtown region or nearby, alternating their stay in their own communities and other in the streets of the region, seeking socialization and drug use. In fact, as found in the field work in São Paulo (Raupp and Adorno, 2011), the socio-economic instability of this population means that in both cities the predominant situation is alternating stays/residence in different locations - such as hostels, shelters, relative's houses or in borrowed/rented places.

All of the users with whom we had contact had not finished elementary school and were from low income families. Some reported having been in prison. They smoked crack in groups or pairs. Although women were observed using the substances, users were predominantly male, as seen in another study of the homeless in region characterizing the region as mainly masculine (Gehlen et al., 2008). Moreover, it is considered that the low visibility of female users in the region is due to the fact that many spend the day inside nearby brothels, as in the CHWs' reports. However, as Adorno and Silva (2013) mention, not all female crack users turn tricks, as there are other forms of activity in the circuit of use in which they can employ themselves, such as activities related to dealing among others, placing them on the border between illegal, informal and illicit.

Concerning age groups, young, adult and elderly users were observed although, in contrast to the study in São Paulo (Raupp and Adorno, 2001), no children were observed using crack. This was surprising as the territory around the bus station had been the object of previous studies mapping it and describing it as the principal point for children and adolescents in Porto Alegre to congregate in the 1990s and early 2000s (Gregis, 2002; Kuschembecker, 2000).

As reported by Diogo, a young man who has been around the region since he was a child, the majority of the "boys" from that time were dead, a fact which, together with the possible results of specific programs to get young people off the streets, reinforcing their family and community ties, may have worked together to reduce their presence in the downtown streets:

Diogo said that when he lived in a shelter he sniffed lolô¹ and smoked marijuana. He was asked whether that was because there was no crack in the city and he said that crack had been there since 2000. He commented that, before crack, the most commonly used drugs around there were lolô and glue, as well as injecting cocaine. He said that those who hung around the bus station are now crack users, and they've been there for two years. According to him, there is no one left of former crowd who hung around there, as they've all died of AIDS from injecting drugs, from overdoses or through violence (field diary).

The health/disease relationship and self-care and self-control practices

As the field work took place together with a health care team, it was appropriate to approach health-disease issues in the public in question, the most commonly reported illnesses reflected the complexity of the Brazilian health care reality, in which infectious communicable diseases are found together with non-communicable chronic diseases, with, in the case of this public as well as that of others living in poverty, the former being more common, with sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, hepatitis and tuberculosis standing out, as can be seen in this extract:

The health care worker talked with a tuberculosis sufferer. A young man nearby reported finding out that he was HIV positive and asked about the treatment. Another man nearby, drunk, overheard the conversation. Another came over to tell us he had just got out of prison, where he had contracted tuberculosis which had never been treated; he reported using crack (field diary).

In addition to the diseases, poor care of the body and of the diet was also notable. The predominant pattern with cigarettes, crack and alcohol was compulsive use, although some differences were found among users who alternated periods of intense crack use with days or weeks in which they did not use, and other users who used in continuously, stopping only to sleep or eat after days of non-stop use:

Diogo says that the users around there don't eat anything, like a friend of his who goes for days smoking crack and without eating. He tells how, one day, he told him to stop for a while and save a little money for food, and now he does this. Diogo was asked whether he also often went without eating and he responded that when the rocks ran out he felt hungry. He tried not to spend all his money on crack, putting aside a little to eat. He told us of one episode when his girlfriend looked at him: "with that look of, you know, wanting more, wanting to smoke all their money, but I wouldn't let her" (field diary).

¹ Expression used to refer to a psychoactive substance classified as a solvent.

Like Diogo, Cristovam, aged 50, a long-time resident of a bench in a square in the region, told us how he felt hungry after smoking crack and got food. Comparing crack with alcohol, Cristovam comments that after smoking crack he manages to eat, which is not the case when he drinks, then he goes for days without eating, leaving him thin and sick. He states that the problem with crack is the *dryness: it seems to dry you up from the inside out*.

As mentioned in informal conversations with users and with FHS professionals, the importance placed on basic care is linked to the pattern of crack use. For example, in Diogo's case, he only uses at night:

Diogo says that he never smoked during the day, only after 18h, to have a little fun, and that he set a time to stop, as he always wanted some money to eat before going to sleep. He only used the drug after he finished his shift minding cars. He said he had never let crack control him, he always knew he could stop when he wanted to (field diary).

In contrast to Diogo – who went back to his mother's house and had stopped using crack even before he left the streets–, another young man reports using it daily:

I'm addicted. For example, as soon as I can scrape together five reais I go and get a rock (field diary).

The precariousness of living conditions on the streets tend to be further exacerbated in compulsive users as, because they prioritize getting the drug, any money or belongings *is turned into rocks*. For example, during a conversation with a very rundown young man, walking with difficulty barefoot, we discovered that the day before he had received a pair of flip-flops and some clothing as a birthday present but, that very night, he had swapped them all for crack – which he related sadly, saying he wanted to start treatment.

Epele (2010), in reference to the dynamics that established themselves following the arrival of coca paste in Buenos Aires, describes the act of swapping shoes for drugs as common practice. As with crack in Brazil, the author highlights the fallacy of this being a cheap drug, as compulsive use means that all the money that can be scraped together is never enough. Objects have always been exchanged for

drugs, although this practice became widespread with the spread of substances like crack.

According to Adorno and Varanda (2010), violence inscribed on the body is another manifestation of living on the street. According to these authors, marks on the body recording fights, getting run down and various levels of violence, are signs of one of the main health problems for this population, external causes. The following extract narrates one such episode of violence:

We arrived at the square and went to talk to Cristovam, on his usual bench pressing his hand to his back and appearing to be in pain. The woman with him commented that several of his ribs had been broken. The health care worker asked why he still hadn't sought treatment and Cristovam abandoned the conversation, appearing uninterested in going to a hospital or health center, in spite of the pain and the worker's insistence. As we left, the worker told me that he has been an alcoholic for a long time and in the last five years began to smoke crack (field diary).

Lack of interest in seeking treatment from the public health services, even for a serious injury, is related with reluctance to enter these establishments because of being homeless and using drugs. Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) call such differentiated, worse treatment of this section of society “symbolic violence”.

Crack: meanings, effects and forms in context

Vargas (2006), on the topic of changes from drugs discusses the questions specialists usually pose when trying to understand the why or the meanings involved in these practices. According to this author, it is more important to look at what happens, how sensations and experiences are viewed, despite the social controls in place to avoid such behavior, than to understand why (Vargas, 2006; Becker, 2008).

It is common for the evaluations of experiences from using crack to alternate from positive to negative. In general, the reports echo the conventional notions in attributing the majority of the problems, such as being kicked out of the home, losing jobs

and lack of confidence from the family to crack itself but, on the other hand, they are often enthusiastic about its effects:

I'm not going to lie to you, drugs give me a lot of pleasure. I like it, And crack gives you such great euphoria, then you want to go after more when the effect wears off [...] Like I told you, crack gives you a great feeling, the best I've ever felt! It gives you euphoria. I like it! (field diary).

The following extract includes information from the statement of a female user describing her path with drugs and outlining the differences between crack and other substances:

Bela told us how she had smoked and drank since age nine. She first got drunk at age thirteen. She went on to drink whenever she could and later tried cocaine, using it for five years. It started as sporadic use to keep awake, but after a while she was using it daily. However, she emphasizes that she wouldn't be in this situation just from taking the other drugs, even when she was using cocaine her life followed a normal course, working and financially organized, she recounted how she even bought a house. She said that it was with crack that she got lost. The first time she tried it she didn't think it was a big deal but, a few months later, she tried it again and never stopped. In four months she had nothing left in her house and weighed around forty kilos. She decided to live on the streets to avoid ending up selling her house (field diary).

Bela's statement raises the question: what is the difference, the rupture introduced by experiencing crack? According to authors such as Zimberg (1984) and Becker (2008), experiences acquired over time on the use and exchanging information between users form informal rituals and social controls acting as protective factors that impede or make it difficult to become addicted. It is, then, worth asking why a long-term user, accustomed to other substances, could not learn to deal with using crack.

According to Vargas (2006), the "high" caused by drugs is an event that cannot be explained based solely on the chemical properties of the substance, because if we view drugs as devices, what matters is what happens, what they trigger, how they form

subjectivities. Some users needed to resort to body gestures to express their feelings about using crack, as in Zé's account:

Crack is different from marihuana. You smoke marihuana and you're atirado. Crack no, it gives you energy, you're up for it. Moving his body from side to side, (Zé shows what he wants to say) You feel wired, you know? (field diary).

Using the body to express the effects of crack may be better understood in the statement – containing a passage from the field diary on how users seem to be plugged in, as if there was an electric current passing through their body. Expressing this through words does not appear so important in the stimulation crack gives, a feeling that is predominantly in the corporal sphere, perhaps explaining the difficulties in holding a dialogue at scenes where it is used:

With cocaine, the pleasure is in the mind. You get agitated. You want to talk a lot, your mind is more agile. With crack, it's in the body, a sensation of physical pleasure. It's different (field diary).

When compulsive use deprives the act of smoking crack of its initial intensity, use becomes compulsive, some describing it as pointless:

(Diogo explains that in the beginning it's good but over time he didn't feel pleasure any more) *I would smoke and just stay sitting there, I wouldn't get up for any reason. You're sitting there like a dummy. You stay there and your head's somewhere else. You start making things up inside your head; picking up pebbles from the floor [...] I ended up smoking for no reason, because you get addicted in that routine* (field diary).

Likewise, Vanessa, a woman living on the streets who usually hangs around the municipal hostel, reported no longer feeling anything when using crack:

Vanessa, telling her story, says that she was a cocaine user, using it often, until one day she was offered crack: - At first the guys called me to smoke with them just to keep them company, they didn't want to smoke alone. That's how I got into it. She states that she now smokes all the time, all day, despite saying that she doesn't feel anything, but

continues smoking as a habit: - You know, you smoke to stay cool, get stoned; but I don't feel anything, just smoking to smoke (field diary).

As well as the histories in which cocaine use, in various forms, predominated before crack use, there are others in which use of other drugs such as marijuana, solvents (especially among the younger generation) and alcohol (usually among the older users) predominated:

Diogo told us how when he lived in the shelter (from age nine to age 18), he sold drugs but he never used crack, although he was curious about it, as the dealer wouldn't allow it. He smoked a lot of marijuana - averaging several joints until it was time to go to the shelter. At that time he also used solvents. He told us how he began to use crack only after he left the shelter (field diary).

José said he had been using crack for nine years - beginning at age 14. Before, he used marijuana. He said that after he tried crack he couldn't stop - he tried three times, but soon relapsed (field diary).

As for the ways of using crack, several users reported having started to use it in the form that is locally known as *Pitico* or *Macaquinho* (mixing crack with marijuana). However, during the field work observations the only form of use observed was in pipes; we did not see cans being used.

Survival strategies related with money

The survival strategies observed did not differ much from those described in the study in São Paulo. There, various alternative forms of survival not directly related to the use of force or violence were observed, for example, shining shoes, minding cars², prostitution or begging. It was also common, in São Paulo, to provide a type of service to individuals going to the area to buy drugs, helping them acquire the drug and find a safe place to take it, as well as producing crack pipes, handmade by the users themselves (Raupp and Adorno, 2011). The latter two activities

were not reported by the researchers in Porto Alegre.

According to Ghirardi et al (2005), living on the street means experiencing another form of capitalist society, the subjects' recognition not necessarily being related to their capacity to produce but rather to their ability to develop appropriate survival strategies for each context. This does not mean doing without money, but rather seeing it as a form of acquiring the essential from one day to the next (Ghirardi et al., 2005). This concern with the essential does not mean that work is eliminated, but abandoning the commitment to steady work every day, substituting other form of producing income.

Among the subjects in Porto Alegre, the main strategies for obtaining money or objects were autonomous and assessable in the context in which they lived. We sometimes talked with individuals with a specific skill that they used in order to survive:

While talking with a group of men, on showed the handmade object he was making. He explained that it was an ashtray made from a soft drink can and he said he always made them to get some money: "there's always a little money to eat; I'm never without a coin or two". (field diary).

I'm a transvestite and a drug users, but everyone around here knows me. I don't rob anybody, I'm a hairdresser. I cut hair for all the dealers around here! (field diary).

As the territory studies is linked spatially with a circuit of recycling activities, almost everyone there collected materials, this being a sure way to get a small amount of money every day. However, we observed a distinction between those who lived from collecting materials, treating it as a routine job – often using “carts” or loading large quantities of material on their backs, which they spent most of the day collecting –, and others who carried out this activity in a less organized way, only collecting things when they came across something profitable.

Collecting material for recycling was so marked in the context of the study that those who circulated there had organized a timetable between them-

² An informal activity that has become widespread in Brazil from the 1990s onwards. It consists of acting as a sort of security guard for the owners of cars parked in the streets. Sometimes optional services are involved such as washing the cars.

selves, concerning not only the opening times of the shelters, community centers and food banks but also the times at which recyclable materials would be collected and sold. At starting and finishing time, there are many individuals going to and from the recyclable material stores in the region.

Regarding the use of illegal strategies to obtain money or drugs, such as resorting to picking pockets or mugging, only one of the users admitted to doing it, stating he was tired of settling for the leftovers from the crack pipes of acquaintances, and thus seeking the means to buy his own drugs. It is worth noting that only one user having reported using illegal strategies to obtain money may well be linked to prudence in front of others who form part of the territory. However, with individuals with whom it was possible to build a close bond, such as Diogo or Bela - we obtained more information on the topic. For example, in the extract below, Diogo talks about his emotional involvement with a girlfriend as a factor protecting them both from involvement in illegal activities:

I asked Diogo how his girlfriend got the money to buy rocks after he stopped using. He said that she would ask him for five reais, which he gave to her, or she would get it begging. As for prostitution, he never let her do it and that if he ever saw her on street corners he would start to mug people; something that his girlfriend didn't want. I asked whether he had ever stolen anything and he said yes, that he used to when he lived in the shelter, but stopped after his brother died involved in a robbery. (field diary).

At various points in the conversations Bela spoke of the strategies she had used to survive. She told us that she had never been involved in prostitution or robbery as she always smoked with acquaintances or borrowed money. She had also lent her house to two friends, users, who paid her by sharing their drugs with her.

Analysis of the survival strategies employed by crack users suggests that resorting to acts of violence is not hegemonic. Another factor that stood out was the existence of a distinct relationship with money, perhaps a reflection of life on the streets, where carrying possessions or values beyond the

strictly necessary is difficult, even a risk. Even in shelters, this pattern remains, given the instability of life in this context:

I met Bela in the FHS. She's happy and is wearing a football shirt from her team. She said the shirt is new and that over the weekend she had also bought shelter for herself, another football shirt for a young man who is like a son to her, and a present for his mother from her welfare money. She spent the money leftover on meat and other ingredients for a barbeque with her friends. (field diary).

From this statement, we can see that the use of different survival strategies aiming to obtain the necessary each day are linked with a way of relating to money in which fluidity guides the rhythm - which can be frenetic in relationships or at times of compulsive use, or slower when, for example, one manages to stay in a safe place (such as a shelter or a friend's house) for a while, in general decreasing the compulsion to use and opening up pathways to investing in other types of "goods" such as social and emotional relationships or even eating properly. According to Bourgois and Schonberg (2009), in spite of the various forms of violence existing in the day-to-day life of drug addicts living on the streets, both the agony and the ecstasy are always present, often several times a day, depending on the success, or otherwise, of their survival strategies.

Final remarks

Analyzing the daily life of crack users understanding it as a specific territory - psychotropic territory - seeks to highlight the dynamics in these contexts, emphasizing the importance of the spatial dimension in their lifestyles and practices.

Viewing the city as the stage of daily experience is to seek a vision in which the streets, the actors and the movements which pass along them are both the product and the producers of social practices (Frúgoli, 1995). Thus, the above mentioned changes in the dynamic of Porto Alegre throughout its history, are reflected in the changes in patterns of occupation and circulation in the streets downtown, reflecting the various processes ranging from degradation of the landscape and of historic

buildings in the region to issues of commercial, real estate and political speculation and to social needs that produce new spaces, while they reshape others, creating an ever greater distance between the economically better off and attracting those in search of forms of survival available through the commercial and economic downtown.

In Porto Alegre there is no large scale plan underway to revitalize the region where crack users congregate, as mentioned above, such as occurred in *Cracolândia* in São Paulo where, in a previous study (Raupp and Adorno, 2011), we highlighted the powers at work in this space in which the emphasis on expelling the users and homeless has been underway for several years without any truly effective measures, aiming to assist in a greater reorganization, being actually used. However, at the start of the field work in Porto Alegre, a joint action between the military police and other sectors of the municipal administration began, installing an aggressive and intensive police presence in the region. The effects of this actions were clearly felt in the places where crack was used and sold, which vanished only to reappear in nearby, less visible, areas.

As mentioned by Fernandes and Ramos (2010), dispersing users has the direct effect of making it more difficult for health care teams to get access to them, conspiring to worsen their social and health conditions and increasing users' access barriers to health care services (Epele, 2010). This is explicit in the difficulties the FHS team had in developing a new working proposal, as they could not bring together a sufficiently large number of users for the actions they aimed to develop. Moreover, describing the survival strategies used by the subjects observed refers to the lack of a direct relationship between using crack and being the protagonist of acts of violence - a linking of positions that has now become a common perception. The data also reveal that the means that crack users employ to survive do not differ substantially from those common to the majority of homeless, whether or not they use the substance.

Although there is no question that continuous use of crack has great potential to develop into a compulsive pattern of use, mainly because of the rapidity and potency of the substance's effects,

users were found who did not follow this pattern of use whereas others, even using the substance frequently, asserted that they did not participate in criminal activities and resorted to alternatives means to produce a minimum income without the risk inherent to criminal activities.

It is understood that the predominance of compulsive crack use among the individuals observed in Porto Alegre is linked to a complex tangle of relationships which go beyond the substance's addictive properties and bring together structural issues of life trajectory. According to Varanda and Adorno (2004), the conditions of living in poverty make the contexts more problematic for creating and maintaining relationship ties, which tend to strengthen or be broken according to the difficulties experienced and the individuals thus suffer more from the consequences of destabilizing situations such as precarious accommodation, unemployment or the effects of precarious employment, in other words, instead of strengthening their personal resources, such experiences undermine the subjects' potential internal organization and their capacity of articulation, such events are intimately related to social structural violence.

Bearing in mind that the conditions of the research did not allow for nocturnal field visits, no users with greater purchasing power were observed - according to information from users and harm reducing social workers, these also pass through the territory in question to buy crack. However, they use hotels or other safer places. Such users may be able to provide important information about different dynamics and consequences of crack use at different social levels - issues which could be examined in future studies that manage to capture these more difficult to access, less socially visible.

As a final reflection, we point out that this study is the result of a slice of space and time seeking to understand a little the intricate range of local relationships and lifestyles. Changes and reconfigurations occur rapidly and dynamically in the psychotropic territories, as revealed during the field work, often implying a large amount of time expended in the search for key informants who were no longer anywhere to be seen or even in trying to capture alterations in the field. Regardless,

we believe that continuing ethnographic studies of these territories complement information from other studies with different methodologies, linking together structural issues with economic/political/cultural processes, enabling the deconstruction of knowledge produced regarding the practices of illegal substance use, aiming not to lose from view the breadth and complexity of the issue when seen from the point of view of social dynamics and of the life trajectories of these populations (Adorno, 2013).

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Authors' contribution

Raupp was responsible for the field work, analyzing the data, reviewing the literature and for planning, writing and concluding the article. Adorno supervised the study and was responsible for the final review of the article.

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