Favela Bairro: combating poverty and social exclusion in Rio de Janeiro's favelas
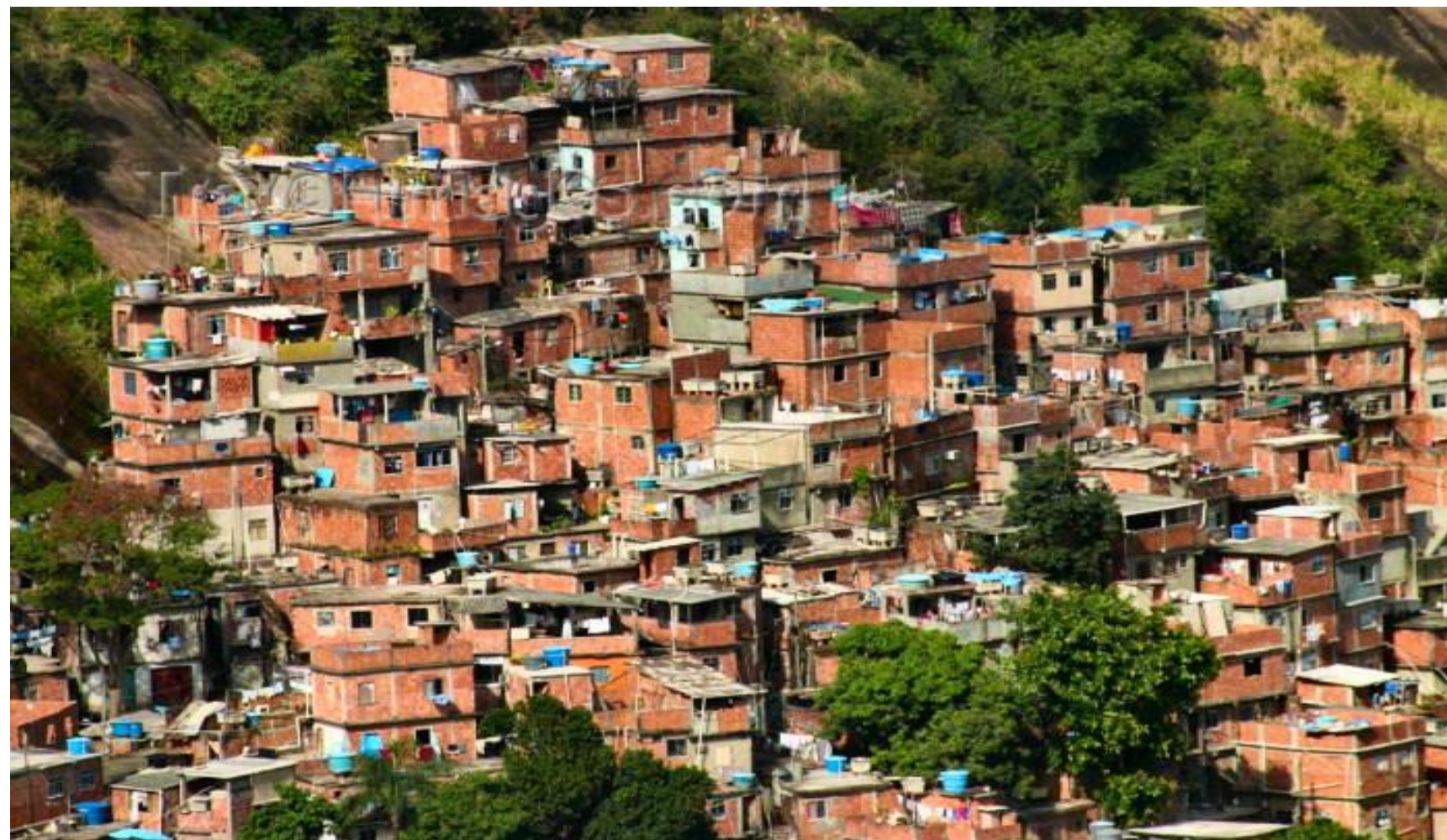
Isaiah Murtaugh

UCLA Blum Center on Poverty and Health in Latin America

UCLA BLUM CENTER on Poverty and Health in Latin America

Introduction

- Before the 90s, Brazil's policy in regards to favelas was to move the residents to state constructed developments and demolish the favelas.
- In 1992, Brazil signed a new constitution with a stipulation that instead, the favelas be integrated into society
- The 10-year Favela Bairro program aimed to pursue this with physical upgrades to all of Rio's medium favelas.
- By improving favela environments, it was thought that the favelas could obtain their own distinctive cultural/neighborhood pride and become part of the social fabric of Rio.

Rocinha, one of Rio de Janeiro's largest favelas

Methods

Research

- Research on this project was conducted across several journal databases.
- Most information was gleaned from peer-reviewed academic articles found on JSTOR's online database.
- Poverty indicators and Gini index numbers (two indirect program targets) were gathered from the World Bank's online database.

Limitations

- While Favela Bairro was well-studied during its operation, very little literature exists on its aftermath, making definitive conclusions difficult.
- This is partly due to the program's lack of definitive goals.
- As a non-portuguese speaker, I was confined to articles in English. It is safe to assume there is a larger amount of research in Portuguese.

The Program

"[the program] is about enabling people to fulfill their dreams, it's about giving a chance for people to have access to the city through which they can realize their aspirations […] it is linked to immediate needs but goes far beyond that to embrace new values and allow for the construction of new citizens" -SMH official

Basic Structure

- Rio's municipal housing organization (the SMH) played a mostly administrative role.
- It focused on vertical integration of NGO's, other bureaucracies, and private architecture and construction firms to complete building projects
- It's main aim (as stated above) was to integrate the favelas and their populations into cultural, social, and economic fabric of the city.

Possible Problems

- The SMH had very little interaction with the favela residents (outside of respective favela associations), based on the assumption that it best knew how and where to develop the favelas
- The program focused solely on physical development, neglecting other aspects of housing development, including social programming and rent assistance..

Data

Gini Index and Population (in millions) at various income levels across Brazil (1995-2009)

Legend: 5.00 USD, 4.00 USD, 2.50 USD, 2.00 USD, 1.25 USD, Gini Index

(y-axis: 0. to 100., x-axis: 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009)

World Bank. (2014) World Bank Databank: Poverty and Inequality Database. retrieved from:
http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableselection/selectvariables.aspx?source=poverty-and-inequality-database

Conclusions

Favela Bairro's Success

- The program set quantitative benchmarks (number of medium-sized favelas "fully developed"),focusing on qualitative goals rather than easily quantifiable ones.
- Due to this, the program's actual success is difficult to gauge. It failed to meet its benchmarks, but the real effect of such upgrades is apparent.
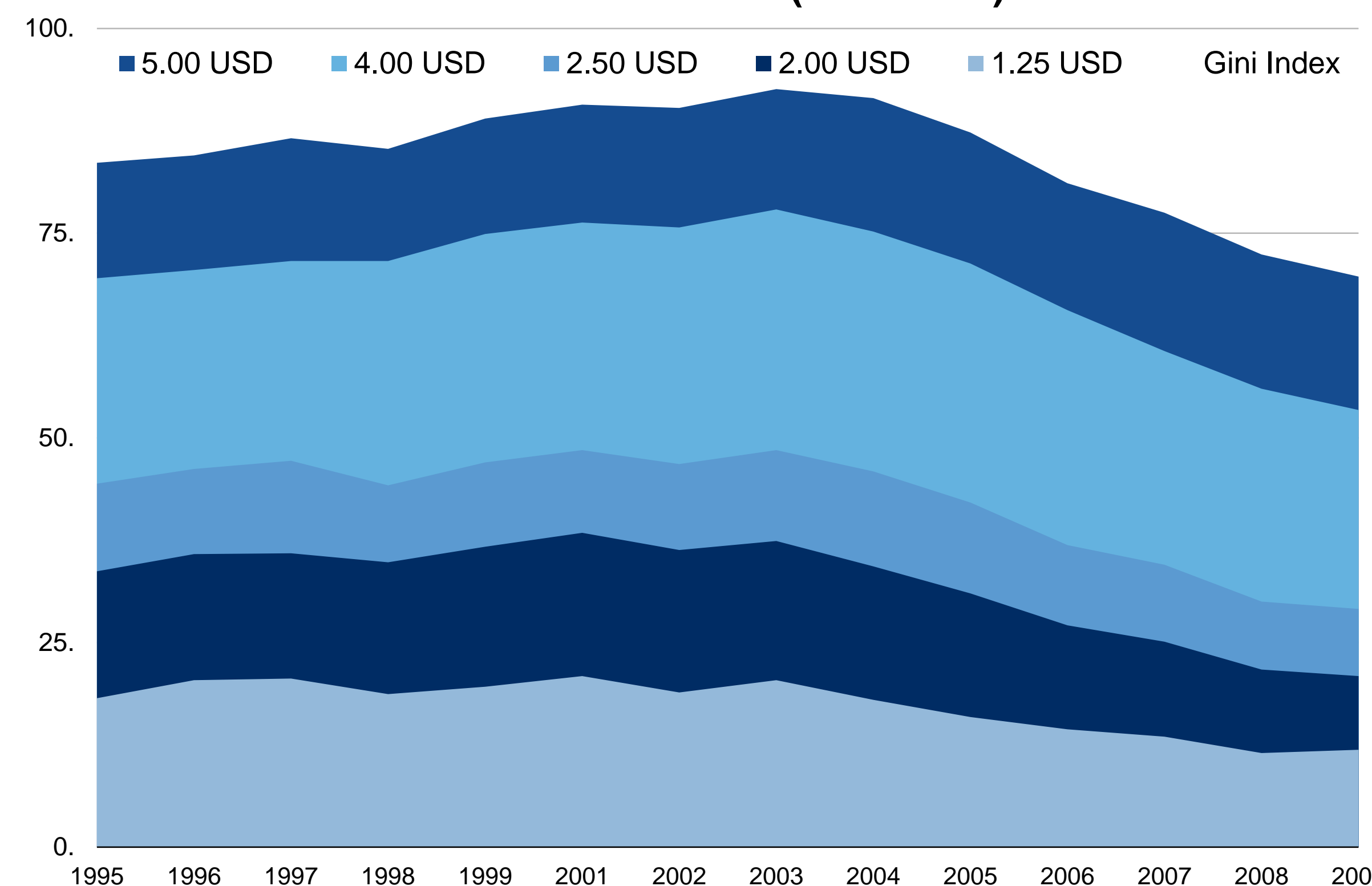
Future recommendations:

- Metrics are available for the psychosocial factors Favela Bairro attempted to address (i.e. future discounting), and can be easily gauged through further study.
- Such a study comes a bit late: the program ended in 2008 and any data gathered now carries the effects of at least 6 years of other factors outside the program's direct effects.
- The concept is worth exploring on a test scale, with an integrated study on its effects over the project's duration.

Favela Bairro's Significance

- The program was recognized by large portions of the international community and mirrored by several organizations.
- Its infrastructural focus is novel, largely unique and merits further exploration.

References

Gay, R., (1990) Neighborhood Associations and Political Change in Rio de Janeiro. *Latin Ameri-can Research Review*. Vol. 25, No. 1, 102-118.

Leeds, E., (1996). Cocaine and Parallel Polities in the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local-Level Democratization. *Latin American Research Review*. Vol. 31, No. 3, 47-83. Mangin, W., (1967) Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution. *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 65-98.

O'Hare, G., (2001) Urban Renaissance: New Horizons for Rio's Favelas. *Geography*, Vol. 86, No. 1, 61-75.

Ramos, D., Victor, T., Seidl-de-Moura, M., Daly, M. (2013). Future Discounting by Slum- Dwelling Youth Versus University Students in Rio de Janeiro (2013). *Journal of Research and Adolescence*, 95-102.

Riley, E., Fiori, J., Ramirez, R., (2001). Favela Bairro and a new generation of housing programs for the urban poor. *Geoforum*. Vol. 32, 521-531

Vargas, J., (2006) When a Favela Dares to Become a Gated Condominium:The Politics of Race and Space, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 49-81.