

A SOCIAL MARKETING APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING A NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a social marketing project proposal for a community in a social housing neighborhood in Faro, in southern Portugal. The aim of the research is to discuss the possibility of the implementation of a neighborhood network, using a social marketing approach with the goal of strengthening the ties of cooperation, solidarity and friendship between the inhabitants of the neighborhood with a view to fostering social cohesion in the city. The paper offers a theoretical and empirical discussion about the characteristics of particular areas designated as social housing neighborhoods. Data collection was performed *in loco* by giving a questionnaire to the inhabitants of the neighborhood and by direct observation. The results facilitated a balance between the needs of the residents and their ability to help their neighbors. The results are followed by a discussion and a proposal for a social marketing project targeted to the neighborhood under study.

Keywords: Social Marketing, Neighborhood Network

JEL Classification: M310, I310

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on social ties in urban areas have evolved from different perspectives. Since the beginning of sociological studies, this theme has been a subject for discussion. Durkheim (1977) argues that a specific kind of solidarity is developed in modern society – organic solidarity – that appeals to the specific contribution that each individual makes to the harmony of the whole. In this kind of society, there is more individual freedom although collective action is more fragile. Wirth (1938) stresses that urban planning is a form of social existence and claims that with urbanization individuals live very close to one another. However, people do not know each other personally and the interactions between them are only temporary and partial and only constitute the means of achieving specific goals. Thus, social relations and bonds become increasingly weaker; the pace of life of individuals is faster than in rural areas and “competition prevails over cooperation” (Giddens 2010: 577). Currently, several projects on social neighborhood networks are being developed in order to revive these ties of sociability and community, aiming to strengthen community relations and social cohesion. These projects aim to benefit the communities and to meet the needs of the residents.

Social marketing, as a discipline, has evolved since the 1970s (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971) and has contributed to the mitigation of several social issues. These issues are not only related

to environment, health, safety, and to financial health but also to community involvement aspects. Social marketing uses the instruments of commercial marketing to encourage individuals' behavioral change in relation to a specific social problem, on a voluntary basis, aiming to benefit specific groups of individuals while having a positive impact on society (Andreasen, 1994; Kotler & Lee, 2012). The social marketing projects should include all stages of the mainstream marketing plan, from strategic to operational aspects.

Nowadays, a large majority of people resides in large urban areas. The census data from the National Statistics Institute reveals that in 2011 about 72% of the population of Portugal lived in urban areas. The social housing neighborhood of Santo António do Alto was built in the late 1990s, in order to resettle the original inhabitants of the neighborhood of Atalaia. It is located in the city of Faro, on the outskirts of the city. The social housing is mixed with private housing and this allows for the presence of different social groups. There are some social institutions in the different action areas and also some local shops that tend to the needs of the inhabitants. Faro is a city of 61,334 inhabitants¹ and it is an area with a high concentration of regional public services. The social housing is on a small scale in the city but the social problems extend far beyond these specific areas of poverty and social exclusion.

In a context where social risks should be prevented, this paper aims to explore an analysis of the needs and the willingness of the community of Santo António do Alto in Faro to participate in a neighborhood network. Furthermore, this paper intends to use a social marketing approach to propose a pilot project for a social neighborhood network called "Rede de Vizinhança" in that specific context. With regard to the behavioral objective, the proposed project aims to strengthen the ties of cooperation, solidarity and friendship between the inhabitants of Santo António do Alto, leading to an improvement in the quality of life of the residents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social neighborhoods and network projects

A neighborhood is characterized as being a community or region aggregated to a town or city. Particularly, a social housing neighborhood is mostly understood to be problematic because it involves a high population density with people from various cultures and with different social problems. This generalized idea results in the process of negatively stereotyping these neighborhoods, which are built in order to re-house individuals and families who are in precarious situations (Caetano, 2009; Moura, 1988). Hence, social housing areas are seen as degraded and involved in local conflicts, which is translated into a no win-win situation for the inhabitants of those same neighborhoods (Fernandes, 1977). Accordingly, neighborhoods are perceived beyond their territorial aspects due to their multifaceted social interactions, which are framed by specific social identities. The concept of a neighborhood society refers to a specific type of social setting that is marked by a strong cultural identity. Specific factors of interaction coexist, which result from the link between the existing dynamics in the neighborhood (internal) and those that are external. This process results in multiple relationship dimensions, attitudes, behaviors and specific symbolic valuations that impact personal and group belonging (Costa, 1999).

In community psychology literature, the concept of a sense of community is broader than the idea of a sense of cohesion and it encompasses the interrelation between membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional behavioral (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). In this respect, Long and Perkins (2003) stress that the sense of

¹ Source: Portugal Statistics, data from the projections for 2013.

community is intimately related to social connections, mutual concerns and community values. Furthermore, the sense of community is linked to the concept of social cohesion, which is a sense of belonging to a group. The feeling of group morale makes cohesion, place attachment and residents' satisfaction related aspects (Boessen *et al.* 2014). In this domain, Boessen and colleagues (2014) conclude that "residents who report more spatially disperse networks for certain types of ties report lower levels of neighborhood and city cohesion. Residents with higher triangle degree within their neighborhood safety networks perceived more neighborhood cohesion" (2014: 447).

Considering that the processes of strengthening ties between neighbors and of meeting residents' needs are important for social cohesion and residents' quality of life, social neighborhood projects are being developed worldwide in order to benefit specific communities. For example, Nextdoor.com is a free social network for communities where only residents of specific neighborhoods can interact and exchange information and needs among themselves. According to this organization the main aim is to "build stronger and safer neighborhoods" and people are using Nextdoor.com, among other things, to: quickly get the word out about a break-in, organize a neighborhood watch group, track down a trustworthy babysitter, ask for help looking out for a lost dog, or find a new home for an outgrown bike. It also provides an opportunity to call the neighbors by their first names. Since its launch in 2012, over 79,000 neighborhoods are using Nextdoor.com in the U.S. (<https://nextdoor.com/>). Also, there is the concept of the "Social Street" originating from the experience of the Facebook (FB) group "Residents in Fondazza Street – Bologna", started in September, 2013. This initiative shows the strong desire to reinforce social ties in cities. The purpose of the Social Street is to promote socialization between neighbors resident in the same street in order to build relationships, to interchange needs, to share expertise and knowledge, and to implement common interest projects, with common benefits from a closer social interaction (<http://www.socialstreet.it/international/info-english/>). All over the world there are many urban experiences promoted by citizens to improve the quality of social relations in their neighborhoods. The "Transition Town" Movement is one which has spread to many countries especially in Europe and it appeals to a holistic way of life that comprehends not only social relations but also a consumption and a production lifestyle that is more sustainable and that addresses the challenges of the environmental problems that we are facing today (<https://www.transitionnetwork.org/>).

2.2 The social marketing approach

The classic article "Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change" from Kotler and Zaltman (1971) points out social marketing as a discipline focused on the acceptability of social ideas and since that time its approach and definition have been discussed (Andreasen, 1994; Dann, 2010). Andreasen (1994) stresses that the voluntary aspect of accepting behavioral change should be the central goal in the social marketing approach. Social marketing should meet the needs and profile of the target audience (Takahashi, 2009) and should follow all the stages of a mainstream marketing plan. In this light, social marketing can be defined as the "the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part" (Andreasen, 1994:110).

The evolution of marketing as a discipline has allowed for the application of marketing techniques for goods and services, ideas, people and places (Kotler and Lee, 2012). Specifically, social marketing has extended the application of marketing to the areas of public health, safety, environment and community in order to influence behavior, while benefiting the individual and society (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). The social marketing approach has been particularly useful in contributing to mitigating the social problems and the needs of

governments and decision-makers for coercive mechanisms aimed at changing the behavior of individuals and groups to achieve policy goals (Hall, 2014).

It is worthy of note that social marketing is not synonymous with a communication campaign. The latter has a limited time of implementation, is focused solely on information and thus is insufficient for assessing behavioral changes. Typically, a social marketing project integrates different communication campaigns in several stages over time and with specific objectives, in addition to all the variables of strategic and operational marketing. Hence, social marketing programs should include all the stages of a mainstream marketing plan: situational analysis, segmentation, positioning (identification of behavioral barriers, benefits and competition), objectives, marketing mix (product, price, promotion and place) and monitoring and evaluation the project (Kotler and Lee, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

The target population of “Rede de Vizinhança” lives in the social housing neighborhood of Santo António do Alto, located in Faro. The aim is to promote a mutual aid network among people who voluntarily support their neighbors and, in turn, are supported in their difficulties and daily needs. According to existing data, this neighborhood has 149 apartments, 146 of which are leased. It consists of a set of buildings built for the purpose of social housing and it has an estimated population of around four hundred people. The socially homogenous profile in the area of social housing can be conducive to the development of neighborhood networks and can also manifest itself as an obstacle to the establishment of exchanging and sharing, because social needs tend to be common and existing resources tend to be limited among residents of the locality. However, the fact that it is a mixed residential neighborhood – social and private housing – means that it can provide a context for maximizing resources.

The process of understanding how a social marketing project could be developed required an analysis of the dynamics of the locality, during three months (March to May) in 2014. The study uses a methodological triangulation approach, combining an extensive with a comprehensive perspective to reinforce the confidence on the data collected (Giddens, 2010; Pérez Serrano, 1994a; 1994b). An extensive collection of data applied directly to the present population. The work resulted in the monitoring of ongoing activities within a local intervention project - Local Contract for Social Development “Faro Adentro”. This project centered on the promotion of territorial cohesion and the reduction of social inequalities in higher economic vulnerability areas and had a set of ongoing activities financed directly by the Portuguese State (Social Security Institute). This project included informal educational activities and community revitalization, based on the promotion of individual and social skills. The aim was to improve the quality of time for leisure and to provide people with the basic knowledge to enable them to decrease the exclusion criteria to which they are subject. In addition to the analysis of secondary data (e.g. local organizations reports), direct observation was conducted which allowed the systematization of information on the dynamics of the territory under analysis. This enabled an evaluation of the availability of the population to participate in the project that the present research is focused. Notes were taken of informal conversations made with this specific purpose.

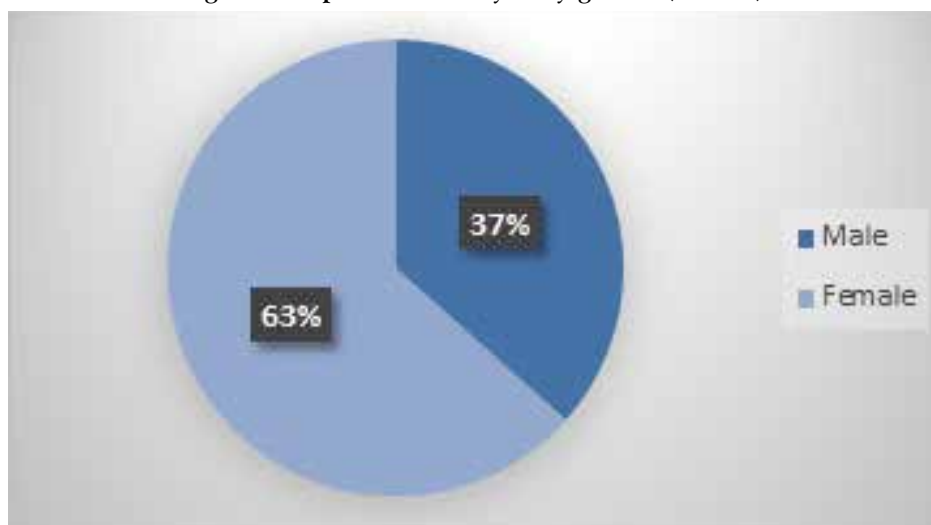
To assess the overall needs of the people and their willingness to work with resources capable of mobilizing a neighborhood network, a questionnaire survey was used. This was given to the population over 17 years, which is estimated to represent $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total population living in the social housing area. It was possible to obtain a convenience sample of 41 people (which corresponds to more than 10% of the total population and about 30% of the population over 17 years old). The questionnaire was intended to collect primary data

on the residents, such as sociographic features, and information about perceived specific needs and the voluntary support that the residents of Santo Antônio do Alto neighborhood could offer to their neighbors. The data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software.

4. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

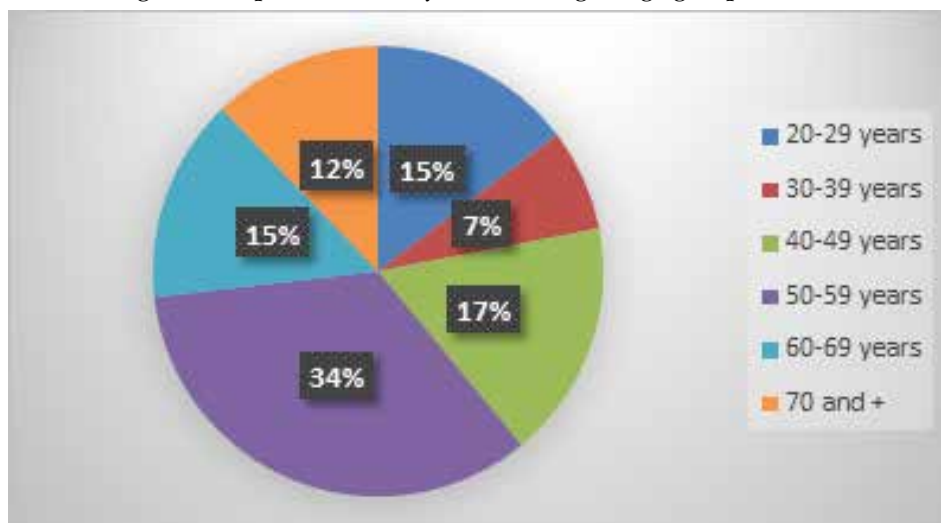
Of the total respondents, fifteen were male and twenty-six were female, aged between 20 and 84 years. As regards the representation by age group, those individuals aged between 50 and 59 years occupied a modal position (representing 34.1% of the sample), the age group from 30 to 39 years had fewer individuals included in the sample (7.3% of respondents) (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Population surveyed by gender (n = 41)



Source: Questionnaire applied to the population of the Neighborhood of Santo Antônio do Alto, 2014.

Figure 2. Population surveyed according to age group (n = 41)



Source: Questionnaire applied to the population of the Neighborhood of Santo Antônio do Alto, 2014.

4.1 Needs and resources to promote the “Rede de Vizinhança”

One of the dimensions considered in the questionnaire given to the population refers to their previous involvement in voluntary initiatives. It appears that the vast majority had never been involved in voluntary activities (85.4%), although among those who never participated 60.5% expressed a willingness to do so. Of those who have participated in these activities, women were more likely to do voluntary work (19.2% of the women surveyed reported having participated in such activities), as well as the population aged between 20 and 29 and 50 and 59 years (33.3% and 21.4% of the population at these ages, respectively, had already performed volunteer work). When analyzing the willingness to participate in voluntary activities there are no relevant differences due to gender and age.

Efforts were also made to verify the availability of the reporting population to help neighbors in their daily difficulties. It appears that most are available to do so (61%) but women are the ones who most demonstrate this desire (65.4% of all surveyed). It is only in the population over 70 years that we observe no availability. This is noticeable because it is a population that shows more vulnerabilities and fewer resources that could be harnessed to support neighbors.

For needs assessment it was intended to understand the set of daily activities in which individuals could benefit from support from neighbors. It was concluded that of the 21 participants who have mentioned these needs, 17 (81%) are women. It is also observed that the number of people that have some kind of need for support increases with age. This is perceived because of the limitations that increase with age (from 21 respondents with support needs in their daily lives, 16 (76%) were over 50 years).

The identified needs list is very extensive but those stated by more than 30% of those people who reported feeling support needs relate to: bureaucratic issues; outings; grocery/store shopping and entertainment activities. The first type of needs can be directly associated with lower levels of education, which are particularly felt among the older population. Also, older residents had mobility issues and a need for help with grocery shopping. It is, however, interesting to note that there are needs indicated by a greater number of people in areas that relate to the creation of social networks (including outings and social activities). This is particularly relevant for the project presented in this paper (Table 1).

The other question relates to the availability of the population surveyed to give voluntary support to neighbors for specific tasks and this response was provided by 25 of the 41 respondents. The list of tasks is the one used to identify the needs. There are no marked differences according to age groups but there was a greater availability of women for this initiative (17 said they were available for some of the tasks stated).

The availability to perform multiple tasks is stated by a significant number of respondents who answered this question. However, there are differences between the practice and demonstrated availability, which incidentally was confirmed by the small number of residents who had previously participated in voluntary activities. The most marked answers refer to visits to the pharmacy, grocery shopping, walks, home repairs and sporting activities (referenced by 14 or more respondents). There is (in general) a greater number of people available to help those who claim the need support in various tasks indicated. Such a tendency would facilitate the introduction of the project proposed here.

Table 1. Population surveyed by type of felt needs and the kind of voluntary support they would be willing to develop

	Type of felt needs	Type of voluntary support available
	Percent of Cases (n=21)	Percent of Cases (n=25)
Shopping at the supermarket / shop	33.3%	68.0%
Buying gas	14.3%	40.0%
Going to the pharmacy	14.3%	76.0%
Going to the hospital	28.6%	52.0%
Going to the health center	23.8%	52.0%
Going to the post office	19.0%	44.0%
Meal preparation	19.0%	36.0%
Caring for pets	4.8%	36.0%
Household cleaning	23.8%	28.0%
Putting out the trash	4.8%	44.0%
Home repairs	28.6%	56.0%
Taking care of kids	4.8%	36.0%
Caring for elderly	4.8%	36.0%
Mechanical aids	14.3%	28.0%
Tours	38.1%	60.0%
Sports activities	23.8%	56.0%
School support for children	9.5%	24.0%
Educational support for younger people	9.5%	20.0%
Support with bureaucratic issues	42.9%	32.0%
Aesthetic issues	9.5%	28.0%
Sewing	19.0%	28.0%
Taking / children to school / day care	9.5%	36.0%
Helping with mobility and transportation	4.8%	44.0%
Gardening	4.8%	32.0%
Social activities	33.3%	40.0%
Total	442.9%	442.9%

Source: Questionnaire applied to the population of the Neighborhood of Santo Antônio do Alto, 2014.

5. “REDE DE VIZINHANÇA”: A SOCIAL MARKETING APPROACH

The analysis of the collected data, followed by a PESTE (political, economic, sociocultural, technological and ecological issues) and a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the project) showed that although there are some barriers to the desired behaviors, the residents of Santo Antônio do Alto are receptive to participate in a neighborhood network. The main objective of this project proposal is to change in a voluntary way the behaviors of the neighborhood residents. The goal is to strengthen ties

and promote cooperation and friendship between neighbors as a means of contributing to the improvement of the living conditions of those individuals and to mitigate isolation.

In addition to the main targets, the social marketer should take into account the possibility of identifying secondary segments, groups of people or organizations that are directly or indirectly, connected to the main segments that may prove to be an asset to the program, simplifying behavior changes (Santos, 2012). This project proposal “Rede de Vizinhança” is directed to individuals older than 17 years living in the neighborhood of Santo António do Alto in Faro, Portugal. The secondary targets are local organizations that can be social partners in the project and also the academic community that can be motivated to study the progress of the project in several academic perspectives. In the neighborhood, there is a variety of social institutions that have different target groups and that are a fundamental resource in the dissemination of the intentions of the project, mobilizing more people to the network. At a university level, is important to evaluate the methodology developed and its impact so it can be improved in the future.

The main barriers identified to achieving the desired behavior are related to aspects of individualism. Most neighborhood residents showed an interest in the implementation of a social neighborhood network, concluding that mutual support can be a way to minimize their daily difficulties and develop new friendships. A few individuals revealed some apprehension regarding this potential project, stating that “the inhabitants of social housing do not help each other,” since there is a strong sense of individualism on the part of these people and, on the other hand, there is a lack of time availability. One inhabitant stated: “I have no time for myself, let alone others.” On the other hand, combating isolation, extending the circle of friends, acquiring new knowledge through contact with each other and creating a more harmonious environment in the neighborhood are some of the main benefits associated with the adoption of the desired behaviors. The fear of being exposed to someone unknown and the need to provide time that could be used, for example, to rest and engage in leisure activities, ultimately prove to be the barriers and competing behaviors that challenge the goals of the proposed project. It is worth noting that although the barriers can be internal or external, real or perceived, they are always from the target audience’s perspective and often something that the promoters can address (Kotler & Lee, 2012).

With respect to the social product, the process of strengthening mutual ties of neighbors is the focus of the project “Rede de Vizinhança”. In order to promote and differentiate this project from other projects, some brand identity elements were developed (Figure 3). The “Neighborhood Office” could be the main physical support for this work, because the residents can go there to get information about the project and how they can be part of the network. This office is supported by the Municipality of Faro and is a community resource that has different rooms where people and organizations can meet each other and develop specific activities (it has a Book Bank, a room for development of arts, another room for photography and meeting and training rooms). At the Social Action Department of the Municipality there is also a Volunteer Bank, which is the organizational context where this project could be held. The residents could also have a website where they can be aware of the activities of the social network. Additionally, we propose the “Neighborhood Corner”, a list of contacts, needs and availabilities that can be presented both in the office and on the website. To access this information, one has to provide identification as a resident in the neighborhood.

Figure 3 - Project logo



The findings of the empirical research reveal that the neighborhood residents under analysis showed an interest in participating in several activities with neighbors in order to create new bonds of friendship and cooperation and to strengthen existing ties. The organization of a diversity of activities in the neighborhood is crucial because without them residents won't feel encouraged to engage with their neighbors and engage instead in individual activities (e.g. watching TV, cleaning the house).

The "Hiking Friend" is a proposed activity that intends to unite neighbors. It was observed that some of the inhabitants considered important to perform sport activities with other residents in order to promote their physical well-being and create new ties of friendship. This activity consists in organizing weekly walks, on a day and time to be agreed with the community.

The project also encourages the development of a dynamic and informative newsletter where the residents are the content providers. This newsletter could be organized in sections such as: general information about the region; monthly activities plan in updates regarding the "Neighborhood Corner"; and a space dedicated to the participation of residents where they could contribute with poems, recipes, and tutorials (crafts, decor, hairstyles), and share other knowledge with their neighbors. This publication could also have a playful-educational part with games and curiosities. The magazine could be distributed monthly to homes in the neighborhood and on the website, so that the inhabitants could have easy access to them.

Another initiative for the neighborhood network of Santo Antônio do Alto is the creation of a community garden, where residents can cultivate some staple foods. Because some people are unemployed and have economic difficulties, creating a garden would aim to keep people busy and channel their free time. This would also strengthen the mutual ties with its neighbors and satisfy some of their nutritional needs. The experience with this kind of intervention reveals that it is one of the more successful in improving generation ties and combating stress factors in the population (Cabo *et al.*, 2014).

An action for volunteering is also included in the project proposal, following the responses of residents to the questionnaire. The volunteering action has three main objectives: to inform the population about what is volunteering; to encourage individuals to volunteer; and to further develop and promote volunteer work in the neighborhood. This action provides an opportunity to allow discussions on values, such as ethics and citizenship, in addition to encouraging solidarity between neighbors.

In the social marketing approach, the concept of price is based on the costs associated with the adoption of the desired behavior by the target group. These costs can be monetary and non-monetary, such as the time, effort and energy. Costs related to the adoption of new behaviors are called input costs. Costs associated with the abandonment of previous behavior are called exit costs (Andreasen, 1995). In the case of "Rede de Vizinhança", non-

monetary costs relate to existing barriers for the adoption of new behaviors, such as limited time availability and perceived monetary costs associated with new efforts to integrate this type of self-help network. The improvement in living conditions, strengthening and creation of friendly relations, cooperation and also a more harmonious atmosphere among the residents in the neighborhood are some of the incentives for the target group to adopt the desired behavior.

Distribution is how the product reaches the target. The aim of an intangible product, such as this project is to reach out to people in a place where they take decisions related to behavior or think of behavioral change (Kotler & Roberto, 1989). Hence, in the case of the “Rede de Vizinhança” distribution is physically focused on Santo António do Alto in Faro, because it is the place of residence of the target group. As previously stated, the neighborhood has an office with opening hours where people can go and ask for information about the project and join the network. In addition to the physical space there is also an online service (website) where individuals are able to learn about the project (mission, goals and vision), to access news and activities associated with it and also to interact in real time with other neighbors, after an online registration with strict privacy policy.

Regarding communication, the newsletter, the website and the office are the main media for the main target. In addition, it is intended to prepare leaflets on the project that will be available at the office and distributed in the mailboxes of the residents. Also, a promotional video including the testimonials of some residents could be available in social networks with the objective of raising awareness of the project and increasing people’s interest in joining the network.

The promotion and dissemination of the activities carried out under the project could also be broadcast on the university radio, Rádio RUA. This is considered to be important because although this is a radio intended for students and not intended for the project’s main target audience it is a means for the project to increase awareness within the academic community. This would allow for fostering interest for this project to be studied at an academic level and finding more volunteers to expand the project.

Following this, comes the idea of conducting a flash mob, an occasion in a public place to perform a certain prearranged unusual action. It is a means of communication in a physical location in order to promote and make known a certain project or activity. This action could be organized by local organizations and volunteers in the project. Residents could be invited to be present at a strategic spot in the neighborhood at a specific hour where the performance would take place. Later, information about the project would be available.

An instrument to monitor and evaluate the project should be developed by an academic team in partnership with local organizations aiming at local development.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explore and analyze the needs and the willingness of the community of Santo António do Alto in Faro, South Portugal, to participate in a neighborhood network. Based on the collected data, a project for a neighborhood network named “Rede de Vizinhança” using a social marketing approach was proposed. This project proposal using the social marketing approach focused on Santo António do Alto neighborhood as a protective place for its residents and encouraged neighbors to strengthen their ties for the benefit of all residents as individuals and as a community.

The previous social intervention developed in the area under study was based on direct financial support from the State for the vulnerable communities of the municipality. After that intervention, the activities that were previously developed had come to an end. Although

there is a rich organizational context, regarding the targeted population of the different social institutions that are placed in the neighborhood, the end of that financial support left a void in the cultural and social activities that were developed over two years. It is important to look at the present proposal as an instrument that can contribute for the creation of local dynamics to ensure social cohesion among the inhabitants. In fact, in the municipality of Faro there is specific context and resources that can help to put this proposal in practice, specifically the already existing Volunteer Bank and the Neighborhood Office.

Given that most of urban neighborhoods, and specifically social housing areas, have needs for socialization and strengthening of social ties to prevent social risks (such as isolation, lack of social support, among others), this proposal could be extended to other localities. The activities proposed are sufficiently general to be applied to neighborhoods with different characteristics. Because there is the need to localize any kind of intervention, it is only necessary to clarify the specific needs for volunteer support as the willingness of neighbors to give that support and to identify the organizational context that can help the improvement of the project. “Rede de Vizinhaça” is, in this perspective, considered a global proposal to give support to social cohesion in cities.

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