

“YOUTH IN THE NORTH ZONE”: INTERSECTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIFE PROJECTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE WORKING CLASSES

“JUVENTUDE NA ZONA NORTE”: ATRAVESSAMENTOS NA CONSTRUÇÃO DE PROJETOS DE VIDA DE JOVENS DAS CAMADAS POPULARES

“JÓVENES DE LA ZONA NORTE”: ENCRUCIJADA EN LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE PROYECTOS DE VIDA PARA JÓVENES DE LAS CLASES TRABAJADORAS



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to understand, based on school experiences, what are and what has supported the production of life projects of young people from the lower classes. The context of the research is a region considered vulnerable in the city of Santa Maria-RS, taking as the locus of investigation a state elementary school in the region. This is a participatory research, whose data were constructed through activity workshops developed in a university extension project, between August 2023 and September 2024. Approximately 30 young people between the ages of 14 and 18 participated. The experiences demonstrated that social conditions, especially with regard to access to goods and services, and support networks, directly interfere in the experiences that can support the production of their life projects, producing few possibilities for mobilizing tools to face the precariousness that limit their viability.

KEYWORDS: Public school. Activity workshops. Social support net.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo compreender, a partir das vivências escolares, quais são e o que tem subsidiado a produção de projetos de vida de jovens das camadas populares. O contexto da pesquisa é uma região considerada vulnerável na cidade de Santa Maria-RS, tomando como locus de investigação uma escola estadual de ensino fundamental da região. Trata-se de uma pesquisa participante, cujos dados foram construídos por meio de oficinas de atividades desenvolvidas em um projeto de extensão universitária, entre agosto de 2023 e setembro de 2024. Participaram cerca de 30 jovens com idades entre 14 e 18 anos. As experiências demonstraram que a condição social, sobretudo no que diz respeito aos acessos a bens e serviços, e as redes de suporte interferem diretamente nas experiências que podem subsidiar a produção de seus projetos de vida, produzindo poucas possibilidades de mobilização de ferramentas de enfrentamento às precariedades que limitam sua viabilização.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escola pública. Oficinas de atividades. Redes sociais de suporte.

RESUMEN: Este artículo pretende comprender, a partir de las experiencias escolares, qué es y qué ha apoyado la producción de proyectos de vida de jóvenes de clases populares. El contexto de la investigación es una región considerada vulnerable en el municipio de Santa Maria-RS, tomándose como locus de investigación una escuela primaria estatal de la región. Se trata de una investigación participativa, cuyos datos se construyeron a través de talleres de actividades desarrollados en un proyecto de extensión universitaria, entre agosto de 2023 y septiembre de 2024. Participaron alrededor de 30 jóvenes entre 14 y 18 años. Las experiencias han demostrado que las condiciones sociales, especialmente en lo que respecta al acceso a bienes y servicios y a las redes de apoyo, interfieren directamente en las experiencias que pueden sustentar la producción de proyectos de vida, produciendo pocas posibilidades de movilizar herramientas para enfrentar la precariedad que limita su viabilidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escuela pública. Talleres de actividades. Apoyar las redes sociales.

Introduction: presenting the debate

Considering youth as a social construct requires reflecting on the elements that differentiate it from perspectives more aligned with biological perspectives—such as the category of adolescence—and which take as nodal points of constitution the age dimension and developmental milestones, placing the individual dimension at the center of its understanding. Youth—the concept that interests us for the purposes of the debate presented here—refers to a social construction intersected by the political, historical, geographical, cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions (Silva; Lopes, 2009). In this sense, its understanding requires the analysis of the power dynamics that regulate its constitution, so that one can then think concretely about what it means to “be young” in certain contexts, which are, above all, collective.

These dimensions also place us before the social markers of difference as transversal elements in the production of these experiences (Melo; Malfitano; Lopes, 2020), highlighting that gender, racial belonging, class, ethnicity, sexuality, territory, among others, have great relevance in the constitution of youth experiences. Taking the urban context as a focus, it is still not possible to separate the understanding of youth from the framework of economic neoliberalism, which produces, in addition to intense inequalities, a subjective construction—and which places the logic of the market as a way of operating in the spheres of social relations and more broadly in all spheres of life (Brown, 2019; Dardot; Laval, 2016)—presenting relevant elements for considering what the life projects of young people from the working classes are and how they have been subsidized.

Within this problematic context, life projects are understood as the realization of goals and objectives for the constitution of future projects (Velho, 1999), in such a way that these are guided by the tools accessed throughout life; what is known; the protection networks used (Reis; Lopes, 2024); and the possibilities of experimenting with diverse practices in a given field of possibilities, and the perception of this field by those who experience it (Melo, 2021). In this sense, a life project or future project can be understood as something unstable and non-definitive, pluralized, multifaceted and complex (Reis; Lopes, 2023), depending on social logics that indicate which places can and should be occupied by subjects (Melo; Lopes, 2023).

The school, as a priority social facility for children and young people, ends up being a *locus* of diverse learning experiences and contact with multiple possibilities, which can support the development of life projects, without losing sight of the contradiction that surrounds it regarding the limits it imposes. In this context, the public school must strengthen social support

networks, especially considering contexts of social vulnerability, providing pathways for social participation. However, according to Trevisol and Almeida (2019, p. 203), in the current phase of economic neoliberalism, the school begins to organize itself according to a neoliberal rationality and defines its frameworks and curricula based on a business culture of competitiveness, innovation, and competition for the technological and global market, operating within this logic. What the authors highlight, in this sense, is how the meritocratic, individualistic, and decollectivizing logic becomes naturalized within the school context, which ends up impacting various dimensions of life, and also—but not only—the constitution of life projects.

Thus, this study aims to understand, based on school experiences, what constitutes and what has supported the development of life projects among young people from underprivileged backgrounds. It therefore stems from a broader research project among young people in a region considered vulnerable, in the city of Santa Maria – RS, with the objective of understanding – more comprehensively – the daily lives of these young people, their social support networks, their relationship with school and public service facilities, as well as their modes of movement and life projects.

Materials and methods

This research adopts principles of social research, using participatory research as a methodological approach. According to Brandão and Borges (2008), this type of research should be conducted in collaboration with subjects, groups, and/or communities, involving the active participation of researchers with the subjects and their contexts. This approach may involve taking the dimension of practice as a locus of action—but also of data collection to be analyzed in conjunction with the broader social dynamics that produce them. In this sense, it places face-to-face “erudite” people and social agencies—such as a sociologist, a career educator, or a human rights NGO—and “popular” people (such as a Tarascan indigenous person, a unionized Argentine worker, a semi-literate peasant from the Brazilian Midwest) (Brandão; Borges, 2008). The authors also emphasize:

One must start from the concrete reality of the daily lives of the individual and collective participants in the process, in their different dimensions and interactions - real life, real experiences, the interpretations given to these lives and experiences as they are lived and thought by the people with whom we

interact (Brandão; Borges, 2008, p. 54, our translation).

The research subjects are young people in situations of social vulnerability—from a region considered vulnerable in the city of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul—who participate in activities within the extension program “*Vulnerabilities, Inequalities, and Difference: Weaving Paths*.” The program’s central objective is to develop interventions with vulnerable populations using *Activity Workshops*, a methodology of intervention in Social Occupational Therapy (Lopes *et al.*, 2011; Lopes *et al.*, 2014; Pan; Borba; Lopes, 2022), aiming to unveil unequal dynamics and how they operate in the daily lives of these individuals, and thus, together with them, mobilize tools and develop strategies to address them.

Activity workshops can be understood as spaces for interaction and connection between individuals, in which diverse activities (bodily, playful, and artistic) can be used as mediating resources in their operation, seeking to connect with the demands of individuals as parameterized by notions of citizenship, rights/duties, and democratic participation (Silva; Malfitano, 2021, p. 3, our translation).

In this methodological approach, activities within workshops are used as a mediating resource for the work of approaching, monitoring, understanding the demands, and strengthening the individual and collective subjects to whom the action is directed (Lopes *et al.* 2014, p. 595)—being the space for connection, for sharing experiences, and therefore for action, which can result in dynamics and projects.

Workshops were developed with young people at a public elementary school in a working-class neighborhood of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, between August 2023 and September 2024, resulting in 24 workshops with an average duration of 50 minutes. Approximately 30 young people aged 14 to 18, from the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, participated in the workshops, which were mediated by cultural, artistic, and recreational activities, among others. The workshops took place during school terms—in negotiation with the school’s schedules and in dialogue with the daily dynamics established there—with teachers, administrators, and other school staff. More broadly, they also engaged with resources and stakeholders in the territory where the school and the young people are located, aiming at various articulations through the dynamics, to implement projects developed with and by the young people, based on the reality and difficulties identified. In this context, actors from the territory were mobilized—such as *graffiti artists*, sports-related projects, capoeira projects, rappers, among others—depending on the outcomes produced by the interactions and reflections in the workshops.

The data were recorded descriptively in the researchers’ field diary, with information about the actions, interactions, and dynamics that permeate them, and the unfolding events that resulted from them. Within this data, we sought to locate the elements that announce, intersect, and dialogue with the young people’s life projects, producing analyses based on thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2006), which is guided by a comprehensive reading of the data to identify the relationship between the accounts, identify core meanings, produce thematic categories, and discuss them in accordance with the research objectives.

In the first phase we selected the data that would make up the *corpus* of this analysis; in the second, we explored this material in order to construct coding operations; and in the third, we identified the core meanings, in order to then carry out the analysis.

As a core element for the discussion about young people’s life projects, therefore, two important intersections were perceived, resulting in two core meanings: (1) access to equipment and resources and (2) social support networks. These cores resulted in the thematic category “Access, support networks and youth repertoires,” as presented in the discussion that follows. We chose to synthesize the data into a single category, considering that both core meanings listed in the analysis process are mutually implicated and constitute a broader intersection regarding the elements that delineate the production of life projects of the young people who participated in this study.

For the purposes of this research, the names of the young people have been withheld in order to protect their identities. The research adhered to ethical principles and was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the Federal University of Santa Maria – UFSM, CAAE: 65354022.2.0000.5346.

The context of the research

The northern region of Santa Maria – RS, the central focus of this research, is considered a vulnerable region within the context of the city’s social and economic dynamics, especially if we take as a premise the historical processes described by Spode (2020) when discussing the influences of the loss of economic importance of this region in relation to the city—as a result of the crisis and subsequent decline of railway services, which were very important for the local economy until the mid-1950s.

Issues related to precariousness at the level of basic sanitation and infrastructure—more broadly—are common characteristics of the region, such as: the high incidence of people with

low levels of education, income, and low insertion in the formal labor market; practices of violence, robberies, and common dynamics related to the drug trafficking circuit and factions (Melara, 2008); lack of spaces for leisure, sports practices, and development of cultural activities (Melo; Prass, 2023); significant rates of homicides and people in conflict with the law (Secretti, 2008); and high rates of homeless people and young people serving socio-educational measures (Ramos, 2010).

These data reveal a context of experiences marked by stigma, especially in how the city perceives young residents of this region. The marks of race, gender, and class show how these stigmas operate, reinforcing difficulties in moving around the city, in accessing public service facilities, and the low access to tools that can support coping with the structural conditions for residents of the region, as we will discuss in the analyses that result from the data obtained through this research.

The school—the central *locus* for the development of the extension program's activities—ends up having to confront daily the problems that emerge from the territory in which it is located, needing to deal with the dynamics of drug trafficking, the challenges in inciting and maintaining the desire for insertion into the job market on the part of young people. Or even the possibilities of remaining in the school system; the scarcity of opportunities for articulations that create spaces for experimentation and experiences for young people in diverse activities; the lack of material and human resources; and the overload on teachers and administrators due to the lack of tools to address the problems they face (Melo; Prass, 2023). All of this marks the context in which the life projects of these young people are conceived, produced, and mobilized.

Regarding the school where the research was conducted, Silva *et al.* (2025) point out the following as important elements:

Young people shared a certain disinterest in school, justifying this by saying that they felt their individual and collective demands were not being heard. They highlighted the constant changes in the school routine, such as the inclusion of some new activity that often did not align with their desires, or even the negotiations regarding the use of the sports court or playground when there were no classes (Silva *et al.*, 2025, p. 4, our translation).

Results and discussion

Planning one's life involves considering various social intersections, such as the presence and consistency of social support networks; the possibilities and forms of access to social rights such as education, social assistance, health, culture, leisure, among others; access to civil and political rights; social participation and its relationship with one's repertoires and ways of life (Oliveira; Pan, 2023).

According to Silva (2016, p. 13, our translation), “life projects are not only aspects concerning the perspective of the future or achieving certain goals that meet the demands of a society based on a market/employability logic as synonyms for personal fulfillment,” but, beyond that, they involve locating future possibilities that align with one's desires, identifications, and skills, without necessarily focusing centrally on thinking about ways to enter productive activities. In this sense, it is understood that the idea of entering the labor market overshadows the broader processes that can give meaning to individuals' lives, based on what truly responds to their desires and dreams.

In this sense, experiences gained throughout life can contribute to the development of life plans, and, previously, access to opportunities is a central element in the experience of young people in situations of social vulnerability, with socioeconomic conditions, which are expressed in various ways, being a relevant factor.

During one of the first activity workshops developed—which aimed to produce a wish list of what the class would like to experience and build inside and outside of school—the young people, after several exchanges, pointed out the following desires: playing ball, watching movies, playing games, going on outings, and listening to music, even stating that these were not common practices in the school context, and often not outside of it either.

“We could organize a kite-flying competition,” said João, with support from most of the group. While we discussed this possibility, the debate was intersected by comments like: *“But it has to be here at school, because there's nowhere good for us to have a kite-flying competition in this neighborhood,”* or even, *“I doubt the principal will allow it.”* Following this, the dialogue continues: *“If I tell my mom I came to school to fly kites, she'll say the school doesn't teach anything useful for me to work.”* And what if we go to the park? Do you think they'll let us *“fly kites during class time?”* to which another young person replies: *“Not the park, there are too many dogs and the grass is too high, it'll be too bad!!!”*

This debate, starting from a specific scene—the young people's desire to organize a

kite-flying competition—reveals several elements that illustrate how the lack of investment in non-localized learning spaces—specifically within the direct content of the subjects—gains significance in the repertoire of youth experiences, supporting the understanding of daily practices beyond those that enable the acquisition of skills and guarantee entry into the job market. This argument can be further elucidated—including through the narrative about the mother's expectations and what investments should be made by the school.

The lack of maintenance of public spaces, the stigmatizing gaze of the city on this region—and consequently, of the young people and residents of the neighborhood who grasp this narrative and qualify the space where they live—seem to permeate the desire to use these spaces; the perspective on how this falls within the scope of the school's daily life and the possibilities it can present, consequently impacting the uses of space and access to certain possibilities for activities and experimentation.

Such desires seemed to corroborate the absence of the possibility of experiencing them within the scope of daily life, placing activities and practices that seem simple for certain social groups as prominent desires for others. These desires highlight the limitations in the development of broader projects, since not even what is considered basic and everyday—such as leisure activities—seems to be guaranteed.

According to Souza and Alves (2019, p. 154, our translation), “the construction of a life project [involves] a way of positioning oneself, interpreting and projecting oneself in the present to modify the future, resulting from experiences, life events and opportunities found in the social context.” Access to social rights – education, culture, health and others – in this context, to material goods and the possibility of insertion into the world of work, are relevant elements to consider when thinking about who the young person is, what their perspectives are and the range of experiences in this liminal and transitional stage to adulthood (Lopes *et al.*, 2014, p. 593). Thus, the difficulty of projecting one's life while experiencing a reality where access to social rights is scarce becomes apparent.

During a workshop, when we discussed their daily activities—especially outside of school hours—the young people stated that their activities predominantly involve sleeping, playing/interacting on their cell phones, and taking care of the house and siblings. Most of the girls are responsible for these activities, as can be seen in the statements of Ana, Marta, and Elis, respectively: “*I like to sleep in the afternoon, but my mother always asks me to keep an eye on my younger sister*”; “*Whenever I'm on the phone, someone scolds me, saying I should find something to do, that there's so much to clean*”; “*What's good to do? When I'm not at*

school, I end up helping my mother with the cleaning when she takes me.” In general, they indicated that their daily routine involves going to school and being at home, usually for more individualized activities.

The lack of access to cultural sports activities—or even leisure activities, considering broader spaces for exchange and sociability—seems to strongly impact the reduction of their range of activities and possibilities, affecting their life plans. This can be seen when, during a workshop, we discussed what they see themselves doing in the future, and comments like “being *an influencer*,” “being a salesperson,” and even “anything” emerged. In this sense, school seems to be the space for building social relationships and coexistence as a way to give vent to what they also lack the resources to do outside of it, such as playing games—elements that the young people brought up in their wish lists.

Given the insufficient resources resulting from the dismantling of education policies (Saviani, 2020), the challenges facing basic school activities are evident, such as having teachers for all subjects or an adequate space for sports activities. The school also lacks spaces that encourage interaction among students or movement, for example, on rainy days. This severely limits the possibilities for developing diverse activities and shaping the meanings that young people attribute to school: *“This school has nothing, the only good thing is chatting with my friends”* (Julia, 14 years old), followed by: *“When it rains, it’s even worse. It’s difficult to get there, and when we arrive, there’s no space to stay [and] nothing to do, because even the teachers are absent.”*

In this sense, from the 1990s to the present in Brazil, conceptions of youth have presented themselves as extreme poles in the praxis of socio-educational institutions and public policies, placing, on the one hand, youth as a social problem; and on the other, young people as social subjects (Brenner; Lânes; Carrano, 2005). Certainly, the young people who comprise this study—taking the school as the *locus* of their action, and the arrangements that stem from it so that participation becomes a horizon—also form part of the framework that has not allocated them as subjects in fact.

Furthermore, living in a territory perceived as unsafe or uninteresting—given its precarious characteristics—tends to influence how young people desire and plan for the future, as well as the elements they can envision and project into their lives within their lived reality. This corroborates the findings of Farias (2021), Gonçalves and Malfitano (2021), and Nunes (2007). In this context, future projects:

They engage with present-day projects, understanding the concept that life projects are part of a total construction of the individual, whether young or adult, where social, cultural, and historical dynamics influence, favoring or hindering the construction of trajectories (Souza; Alves, 2019, p. 160, our translation).

One of the workshops involved several videos of activities being carried out by young people in different contexts—predominantly in public spaces and social facilities—with a view to identifying those activities in their own daily lives, as well as the use of facilities and the territory. According to Gonçalves and Malfitano (2021, p. 6, our translation), “urban mobility is essential for the recognition of the territory and its subsequent appropriation, enabling future social participation, the realization of the right to the city, and the construction and consolidation of territorial social networks”.

The issues raised involved the use of buses in the city, the places where they are found, and their relationship with each other outside of school, as well as internet use. Young people reported not using buses, stating that they only use them occasionally to go to the city center. Some were unaware that students have the right to pay half-price fares. This is particularly relevant when considering that, according to them, the cost of transportation is one of the factors that prevents them from moving around the city, including accessing free activities offered by the city’s Department of Culture in some neighborhoods. In this regard, Farias and Lopes (2021, p. 6, our translation) warn that:

Although human life carries the elements of natural flows, its circulation in territories and spaces is forged in the historical, social, political, subjective, and cultural processes established by social reality, in contradictions, dilemmas, accidents, alienation, power relations, inequality, resistance, choices, the possibility of freedom, conservation, transformation, intentionalities, that is, in the praxis that makes up everyday life.

During a photography workshop—which involved photographing spaces they liked in their neighborhood together—the young people reported that they did not meet frequently outside of school, a fact that appears to differ between boys and girls. In the girls’ experience, contact through relationships formed at school seems to be more frequent; outside of this setting—and very commonly—interactions are mediated by internet use, as found by Oliveira *et al.* (2017) when discussing the internet use of 60 adolescents. Some reported on exchanges made through social networks, such as sharing videos and photos of gossip.

Although gender markers reveal differences in the ways everyday practices are constituted, and consequently, in the ways desires are produced that underpin the construction

of life projects, some desires seem to be common. This is because, although gender experiences produce differences in the ways boys and girls—and different genders—experience social practices (Scott, 1995), and therefore, in the way they constitute elements that underpin the production of life projects, the class divide certainly homogenizes a good part of these possibilities.

Going to the mall, the theater, visiting the city's public university and the Planetarium—for these young people, although access to these spaces is strongly perceived as something unattainable, in general, and upon learning that they can freely enter and visit the university—they show a certain surprise. Considering these various barriers, both material and symbolic—that hinder their access and daily practices—how will these young people have the resources to develop life projects if they lack a repertoire of experiences that would allow them to build, for example, the desire to explore spaces in the city where they live? If, for them, territorial belonging ends up constructing a feeling of impossibility of access even to public spaces? If they feel perceived as not belonging to these spaces, especially by a bodily geography that, when interpreted in these spaces, places them in the position of being dangerous? For Correia and Gonçalves (2021, p. 3, our translation), the city is a:

Social space produced by physical territory, which provides support for individuals to carry out activities that, through the sharing of their meanings, fulfill the function of structuring and dynamizing the processes of sociability, coexistence, and social participation.

From the moment they lack access to these spaces and activities, their experiences become heavily restricted to those produced within the school, which is also marked by shortcomings in meeting these needs and those present in its territory—often related to violence and crime—leaving gaps in the lives of young people in situations of social vulnerability and preventing access to essential resources for maintaining daily life and for building a repertoire that equips these young people with tools to think about their life projects.

In this sense, experiences at school invest, as far as possible, in creating subjects engaged in the current mode of production, who incorporate market instability as a naturalized *continuum* and individualize failures, detaching them from a broader reality in which it would be possible to understand the social problems that construct them (Laval, 2004; Boltanski; Chiapello, 2012; Dardot; Laval, 2016; Moimaz; Santos, 2024).

The musical repertoires shared weekly through a collectively created playlist also seem to highlight important issues, as a large portion of the songs describe young people from the

favela narrating their success based on consumer possibilities. The subjective production that results from this not only reveals an identification with a life context—given the singers’ origins—but, more specifically, presents life projects connected to the possibility of consumption, which redefines the possibility of dreaming within a system that says there is no place for everyone in the “world of success” and “ostentation.”

In this sense, “consumption, which comes to be experienced as a mechanism for inclusion and status, brings the idea of access to a social world that exists around us” (Nunes, 2007, p. 666). Thus, a possibility of projecting visibility is seen, using these accesses to escape the invisibility produced by social inequality. For Nunes (2007, p. 668, our translation), “among young people, this is practically the general rule: consumption offers visibility within the group and creates social identities,” making it possible to project life in a more consistent way and using the tools available and almost unfeasible.

Farias (2021) proposes two areas of life projects: the first are needs-projects, which are linked to more urgent needs; the second refers to projects associated with more distant futures and linked to dreams, which are dream-projects. With this, it is possible to understand that many young people who have more restricted access, in order to find ways to meet their needs or to help their family, will prioritize their current needs, and only then think about their dreams and desires, which are often not recognized by young people as achievable desires in life.

When we talked about “the coolest things they’ve ever done at school,” to varying degrees, all the young people recalled activities developed within workshops or in projects stemming from them, such as various experimental activities, graffiti, rap battles, interclass competitions, photography, and audiovisual production. This data demonstrates that the school has a limited scope of resources to offer diverse activities, highlighting a certain disbelief in the quality of what can be offered there, fueling an idea that, being embedded in a context of social vulnerability, it offers nothing that transcends the limits of that vulnerability. In this sense, it is crucial that actions with these young people can:

To guarantee greater opportunities and choices for this population, which finds itself isolated in the face of fragile prospects for meaningful life projects and close to informal, illegal work, with little schooling and, therefore, in a situation of social and personal vulnerability (Lopes *et al.*, 2014, p. 600, our translation).

The scarcity of opportunities within school activities—coupled with the absence of relationships that extend beyond the school environment, as evidenced by the statements presented—restricts forms of interaction, the production of social exchanges, and practices of

mutual support. In this sense, it is understood that the absence of a consistent social support network, both formally—equipment, policies, programs, and services—and informally—family, community—impacts the construction and maintenance of a repertoire of experiences, which can be fundamental for building life projects.

Therefore, the goal is to strengthen the relationship between young people and the school— aiming to establish it as a support network for them, a space that allows them to broaden their range of experiences and support the development of strategies to cope with the difficulties and issues they face due to fragile relationships and social vulnerability. In this sense, there is a need to rethink and:

Transforming the ways in which relationships are formed in public schools, in order to favor the creation of social support networks among the young people themselves and between professionals and young people, so that the school can effectively contribute to addressing these situations by strengthening the support network of its students, being, in addition to a place of learning, a space of care (Oliveira; Pan, 2023, p. 16, our translation).

Final Considerations

When considering life planning, access to goods and services—in addition to the connections formed within a supportive social network—is important for understanding the desires of these young people and the extent of their support in devising paths to achieve them. It is these supportive social networks that will help in constructing the composition of desires that they believe are possible or not. The subjective production that enables the construction of desires is also related to how adults perceive them. The reiteration that they “don’t want anything out of life” marks the absence of possibilities for these young people to see themselves outside of these terms, impacting how they see themselves in the world and, consequently, what they can desire. Therefore, the situation is aggravated if we consider that these adjectives come from individuals who, within the framework of social relations, should be protecting them.

The internalization of these adjectives also forms a certain relationship with life projects, so that these begin to focus on “taking care of oneself” in the material dimension. Since their creativity is not valued, their potential and talents end up becoming secondary in the face of a social dynamic that announces—through its various actors—that the most these young people can achieve—in terms of producing forms of participation—is to occupy positions in the labor market, at best, informally—since it is the repertoire that is fostered and strengthened

by the absence of opportunities and the need to solve more immediate issues that affect their view of the future.

Therefore, thinking about their futures is centrally focused on work—following in the footsteps of their parents or family members—but they don't see possibilities different from those available to people within their social circles, such as entering university, because this possibility is understood as something they cannot achieve, given the investments required to compete for a place. The idea that the university is a locus of the dominant classes—even though we currently have policies for inclusion and retention, student support, and quota policies—seems to be related to the understanding of the socioeconomic profile of those who are part of it. Similarly, the idea of engaging with diverse experiences in order to recognize one's affinities, skills, and interests is also permeated by the resources available to access them, ultimately contradicting the market-driven logic that true investments should be made in what can be understood as possible, to guarantee some socioeconomic autonomy. This often ends up being addressed through the drug trade—which, among other things, also creates a sense of protection and guaranteed respect from peers.

Conversely, when they look around, they realize the difficulties that family members face in meeting the daily demands of survival and maintaining life: such as grocery shopping, paying bills, and having some leisure time. Because of this, young people seek alternative paths to what is presented and the reality that confronts them – often, this involves the possibility of entering jobs with salaries below expectations that still meet these needs.

On the one hand, precarious access, fragile social support networks, and the absence of spaces for circulation and interaction seem to play a central role in shaping life plans. On the other hand, the spaces of the activity workshops appeared powerful both in producing diverse experiments and contacts with possibilities uncommon in the daily lives of those young people, and in reflecting on how these concrete conditions affect the construction of their daily lives.

This study, therefore, highlighted the challenges faced by young people in maintaining their daily lives and, consequently, in building their life projects, demonstrating that socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions directly influence the opportunities and perspectives of these young people. In this context, activity workshops emerged as a possibility to identify and name these difficulties, create spaces for exchange and belonging, provide support for daily life, and locate the fissures through which new possibilities for projecting life can be created. This can announce—and this is what we defend here—

possibilities within the scope of public policies, especially in place of those that treat young people as a “social danger,” seeking to “lead them to a more stable position” in social dynamics, even if they do not explicitly state the subordinate character that sustains them. To that end, we understand that the proposals must engage with the reality of young people—attentive to the challenges of their historical time—in order to open spaces for the construction of forms of social participation, without this having to centrally and primarily respond to the demands of the market.

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