

# Subjectivities and Resilience: Construction of Peace Culture in Young People at Risk with Creative Entrepreneurships

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**Abstract :** Social dynamics involves constitutive elements of the environment, as well as aspects of individual's subjectivities that in one way or another permeate social coexistence. Based on this scenario and taking into account the undeniable gaps of inequality and exclusion present in many societies whose protagonists are young people, it is valid to ask: How is it possible to promote a culture of peace in young people at risk who are outside the educational system of the Cultural Entrepreneurship?

The initial approach that ensures the development of this work was the set of elements of young people's daily life and the understanding of the various factors that influence their attitude, sometimes violent. This is how the research contemplated figuring out the state of consciousness of young people at risk to identify not only how they perceive their reality but also how they build interpersonal relationships with other human beings. Finally, it was sought to make known all those cultural symbolic elements inherent to their daily lives, establishing the dimensions of their human condition that would contribute to the definition and co-construction of proactive and creative life projects that will significantly contribute to the generation of an environment of peace from the generation of creative enterprises.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Popular Education, Culture of Peace, Creative Enterprise

## Introduction

This research emerged as an opportunity to respond to the phenomenon of youth violence present in contexts of social inequality typical of the city of Cartagena de Indias, based on its risk condition. It is the reason for establishing alternatives to reduce both their condition of inequality and their violent actions. Based on the research's general objective of generate a *culture of peace in young people at risk who are outside the educational system*, a socio-educational proposal is formulated based on the consolidation of proactive life projects derived from subjectivities and resilient capacities among young people at risk. The specific objectives of the research aim to reveal the subjectivities that make possible to identify the resilient capacities of young people at risk who are outside the educational system, establishing the dimensions of the human condition in young people at risk which contribute to the definition and co-construction of projects of proactive and creative life; and define the essential elements for the construction of a socio-educational proposal that brings together productive life

projects and a culture of peace in young people at risk who are outside the educational system.

### **Image 1**

*Gang fight in the city of Cartagena de Indias*



### **Theoretical Framework**

The horizon of the research was based on different theoretical references. Foucault (1994) states that “the necessity of self-care is linked to the exercise of power [...] It is not possible to transform self-privileges into political action over others, in rational action, if you haven't taken care of yourself” (p.42). From the Latin American context, it is based on the theoretical principles of Fernando González Rey. Regarding the Resilience category, it has been based on the theory developed by Norma González Arratía, one of its greatest exponents in Latin America, and finally on the extensive experience of the results of the Education for Peace project developed by Alfonso Fernández Herrería, UNESCO collaborator in the construction of Education for Peace tools, along with the ideas of Paulo Freire (promoter of ‘Education for Liberation’). Under these theoretical conditions, a methodological design was approached that allowed a permanent dialogue with the youth at risk. This design was based on prominent references such as Orlando Fals Borda and Miguel Martínez Migueles, among others, in order to enable a greater approach to achieving the proposed objectives.

Thus, young people at risk are particularly those who are outside the educational system and are not developing any productive entrepreneur; youngsters exposed to the roughness of their environment, and induced in many cases to criminal and violent actions, as a consequence of their need to spend their leisure time and, above all, their urge to find a better way of living.

This also applies to the satisfaction of their basic needs and fundamental civil rights. The Colombian Constitution in its article 45 states that “the adolescent

*Subjectivities and Resilience: Construction of a Culture of Peace.../Nacira Ayos Figueroa* (young person) has the right to be protected and to obtain a high-quality education". Therefore, these civil rights must be provided by the State, in order to set a series of actions to attend the needs of this population. And yet, despite all government efforts, the social actions are not generating a true transformation in young people's lives, especially in vulnerable zones. This situation triggers the need to design strategies aimed to reduce violent behavior of young people at risk, and urge the develop of a 'culture of peace' that can be joined to the State's efforts in the protection of youth population, including life projects from the complex subjectivities of this particular group of people.

It's appropriate to recall the United Nations definition of youngster as people between 15 and 24 years of age. UNESCO understands that young people constitute a heterogeneous group in constant evolution and that the experience of "being young" varies greatly according to the regions of the planet and even within the same country. It is precisely this stage where the individual chooses his friends, defines the taste for clothes, music, occupation of free spaces and his positive or negative attitude toward actions, depending on his interactions at home or at school, and with his environment.

Based on the types of personality structures, such as social, political, economic or cultural, it is significant to take into account the result of constructive processes that are building up based on young people's interactions and relationships; according to the capabilities of each subject, it generates a reciprocity process according to their specific historical context. This consideration implies the necessity to identify the structures of their socio-historical reality and how they give meaning to their reality according to their own subjectivities, and how —for some of them, raise the notion of a value for their own lives while for others does not. In the case of young people at risk, the key factor is to establish the significance of institutions and its environment, to define and co-develop alternative solutions. Regarding young people at risk, Ospina, Patiño and Vega (2012), consider that:

*"They continue to be young people, in many cases stigmatized as generators of violence, as a social problem, as passive consumers, as offenders and producers of risk that must be controlled; and their experiences, meanings, and contributions to the development of daily practices for peaceful coexistence have been unknown and often made invisible, giving priority to the negative side, to the discrimination, and what does not fit into the establishment parameters" (p. 170).*

It is undeniable that the social costs of youth unemployment are high. It creates social struggles with high social consequences such as poor health, the breakdown of relationships and families, the increase of crime with additional needs that demand significant expenses. For instance, crime among unemployed youth tends to escalate if the way how society deals with the problem produce more antisocial behaviors and negative attitudes toward them.

The current scenarios of youth violence raise the need to consider the existence of a close relationship with the processes of social exclusion —where the link between violence and context is fed back, and the way how social, territorial and family environments can lead to violent resolutions among young people. The stigmatization of youth for their alleged violent condition breaks solidarity and intensifies exclusion. In Colombia, according to the *Report of the Resource Center for Conflict Analysis, Youth Violence in Urban Contexts - CERAC (2014)*:

*“A series of environmental elements are recorded that affect the vulnerability of young people and also converge in groups of young outlaws and their involvement in violent actions; environmental elements such as the increase of displaced population, accelerated population growth, the presence of organized violent groups, the expansion of the marginalized and stigmatized population that is linked to chains of illegal economic activities, which —in many cases, involve young people who end up as vulnerable youth” (p. 77).*

All those elements are considered as triggers for violent actions of young people in vulnerable conditions. It is evident that although there are efforts by local authorities in the city of Cartagena de Indias —and the plans and programs proposed by its local government represents those from the Ministry of the Interior— they do not achieve the expected results, since violent environments persist, as well as the condition of risk in vulnerable young people.

These foregoing aspects provide elements that the research takes into consideration as structural bases for the design of plans and strategies that truly contribute to the improvement of the behavior of young population in vulnerable conditions. Along with the environmental factors that influence youngster's adverse behavior, their subjectivity and individual capacities must be considered also as a fundamental element, which could allow a true inner-transformation.

Based on this perspective, the research uses the UNESCO *Joint Program on Culture of Peace* as a reference, due to the fact that it seeks out and promote the shared construction of conditions that allow the raise of a *culture of peace* in which conflicts are resolved through dialogue along with the construction of consensual agreements; where intercultural talking allows better approaches to a common ground for sharable truth within people —like social groups and communities— to find conditions to build up and develop self-thinking, considering reasons of others and for the others. Thus, in this design of educational strategies, the identification of customs and habits of young people at risk, and the definition of a co-construction based on their experiences and expectations, is a dynamic and groundbreaking proposal that allowed them to discover their own potentialities, in order to build proactive life projects and transformations that led them to be a proactive youth in a constant search for alternatives of peaceful coexistence and generators of a true *culture of peace*.

It is important to point out that from the beginning, the main intention of this doctoral research was to identify the elements of subjectivity within young people for the co-construction of an educational strategy that would allow them to generate environments for peace; but the realization of other elements helped out to enhance the research, delving more inner-realities involved in this process, and allowing the researcher to understand the undeniable fact of this young population, stigmatized and limited, above all, by aspects of socio-economic nature, rather than by their individual capacities. Thus, beyond the purely educational aspects, emerged a project of *Cultural Entrepreneurship*, which although did not fit into the main objective of the doctoral research, it proved to be helpful to provide an alternative solution for the needs of this group of young people. To that matter, we have Harper (1994) who defines entrepreneurship as “*a profit-seeking activity aimed at identifying and solving specific problems in complex and structurally uncertain situations*”; which fitted well as a systematic way to solve the problem found at hand among these youngsters, especially in the structural connotation of the research.

## **Problem Statement**

This investigative process was born as an opportunity to respond to the phenomenon of youth violence in contexts of social inequality, in order to analyze existing stereotypes regarding young people at risk and the possibility that they become violent youth; likewise, to establish an alternative to reduce both their condition of inequality and their violent actions, the researcher then recorded and studied a series of experiences in the actual environment of these young people. Consequently, the researchers focused their efforts on solving the following questions: What are the subjectivities and resilient capacities of young people at risk who are outside the educational system? What are the dimensions of the human condition in youth at risk that would contribute to the definition and co-construction of proactive and creative life projects? What kind of strategies are required to design a social-educational proposal that joins proactive life projects along with a culture of peace in young people at risk who are outside the educational system?

## **Results**

As Fals (1995) states:

*“Common people deserve to know more about their own living conditions to defend their own interests, that the other social classes that have monopolized knowledge, resources, techniques and power itself; therefore we must pay even more attention to the production of knowledge than to the material production. So that we can leverage the balance of justice in favor of the unprotected groups of society” (P. 78)*

With this in mind, the presentation of the results was based on the analysis of the narratives of the participating actors, in order to do not suppress nor subject the voices and actions of the researchers to a parameterized rigor. The matrices were also designed to synthesize the relevant information in the actions carried out. It is also relevant to indicate that in the investigative process quantitative and qualitative information was used, but the quantitative data was submitted to a critical-social perspective.

This is how the *Unveiling of the Subjectivities and Identification of Resilient Capacities of Young People At Risk Who are Outside the Educational System*, allowed the analysis of the socio-cultural representations of young people in their context; first, from the validation of the scenarios where young people experienced their social relationships, followed by the assimilation of their identity elements, represented in their Afro-descendant condition, which was decisive in the appropriation of their cultural expressions.

A key factor was revealed in the PAR by the researchers related to the communicational aspects, where biographical stories were characterized by the use of body expressions, that reflected the experiences lived by this group of young people during their social interactions; making reference to the adverse elements of their environment that affected them, such as gang fights and the illegal trade and use of psychoactive substances. However, despite these factors, their ideals and life expectations prevailed firmly grounded on their family relationships. Thus, it was possible for the researchers to monitor the emotional state of young people toward the achievement of self-transformation.

The *narratives* of these young people revealed elements of a violent environment that in one way or another influenced their subjectivities. However, they have the boldly desire to go on and produce their own dynamics, in such a way that —although they do not fit into common symbologies— they can be assumed as *adaptations* of their own realities; and, while they may not be fully understood by others, they can be considered as a tool to gain social integration, in such a way that those symbolic elements used by the group of young people can be interrelated to the elements of their own social logic, represented especially in their language, which proved that the ‘generating of knowledge’ is the right process in order study the socio-cultural conditions of this youngsters. It also clears up the need for an open *communicational dynamic* that enables a constant dialogue within the process of appropriation of knowledge in order to achieve the consolidation of *environments of peace*.

Dimensions of the Human Condition in Young People at Risk Helping in the Definition and Co - Construction of Proactive and Creative Life Projects. This stage relied on the anecdotal record as a basic instrument for recording unsystematized observations within narrative techniques, which young people related to some negative aspects in connection to their environment, such as the lack of scenarios for recreation or sports activities nearby their neighborhoods. They mentioned to have only one: El Biblioparque de San Francisco, but in this place only reading or painting activities are carried out for boys and girls from the

*Subjectivities and Resilience: Construction of a Culture of Peace.../Nacira Ayos Figueroa* two neighboring schools; and on the other hand, they have an open field called La Terraza Wio, where they take part in ‘tapita bat championships’ [whacking soda caps] on weekends, overcoming the danger of drunkards fights nearby the Terraza, along with the hazardous existence of ‘invisible gang barriers’, which do not allow them to move freely in the area. As Silva (2007) mentions:

*“When free time is used creatively, developing skills, promoting personal balance and inspiring his experience, the subject fills his life with content, giving leisure to his personal dimension. This leads to suggest that leisure would be like the free time that the subject uses to do what he likes and that generally entails personal growth” (p.33).*

Along with these dangerous conditions, they face the spread of criminal gangs linked to trade and use of illegal drugs in the neighborhood, which induces many of them to engage in criminal activities. At this point, it is important to review Durkheim (1897) as a reference. He considers crime as a concept *“that expresses the crisis, [and] disturbances of a collective order and the collapse of rules in a society (the social order), due to the transformation or social changes produced in an abruptly way”*. Which allowed the researchers to infer that today's society faces a major crisis that impact social harmony, despite advances on the economic fields. It is the main reason for exclusion behaviors and social inequality that brings down any individual aspiration or goal achievements, which also brings the sense of lost and disorientation with no possible solution at sight. These conditions are usually linked to social disintegration, represented in criminal actions

The research aims focused on identifying the characteristics of the human condition of the group as a way to promote their participation in the achievement of life projects. Therefore, the research activities were conceived as a space in which every young person of the group could tell his/her own life stories. In words of Martínez (2004) life stories are:

*“Stories that in one way or another have biographical and autobiographical content as their theme [such as] personal memories, life testimonies, etc. [...] It is a narrative developed in a systematic coherent and complete way of the life of a subject, whether carried out by himself, autobiography, whether carried out by another, simply a biography” (p. 212).*

Life stories revealed that some of this youngsters have had to assume responsibilities from an early age, such as helping to take care of their younger siblings, on preparing dinner while their mothers return late from work, or in some cases they even help their parents at work (usually casual works), which has made them grow up and mature before their time. This activity allowed the identification of some resilient factors presented in these young people, as well as the development of a focus group work, which provided valuable feed-back about emotions and experiences of each participant, resulting in the recognition of

resilience factors related to their personal satisfaction, equanimity, perseverance, self-confidence, and the notion of feeling good on their own.

As a result of the process of Defining Essential Elements for the Co-construction of an Educational Proposal that Consolidates Proactive Life Projects and a Culture of Peace in Young People At Risk Who are Outside the Educational System, the young people recognized, among other aspects, that the lack of control by their parents, eases them to have access to alcohol or illegal drugs. At the same time, they pointed out the importance of having the guidance of their parents, especially because of their vulnerable condition as young people in a process of self-discovery and constant learning. Reviewing Flanquer (1998):

*“The importance of the family in today's world lies in the fact that the fixation of the aspirations, values and motivations of individuals depends on it; on the other hand, it is responsible in great measure of their emotional stability, both in childhood and in adult life” (P.36).*

This proved to be consistent with the feelings and emotions of these young people, who considered that there should be a way to raise awareness on the parents about their responsibilities as role models at home and the necessity to count on them as a constant presence in the lives of their children.

In addition, a period of socialization (of open dialogue) was created in which every young person expressed their own expectations. Most of them talked about their efforts to gain economic resources and to finish studies in order to acquire better job opportunities. It is important to bring attention on the fact that the research made possible to identify also the life goals of older young people (young adults), who remarked they prospects on getting better jobs to help their families economy at home. Although, some of them showed unrealistic expectations related to the jobs they wish to obtain, taking into account that they barely completed their basic school education; but on the other hand, they all shared their interest in joining musical groups or dance groups, that could not only provide them of the economic relief they seek, but also as a way to spend their time on doing a leisure activity they like.

Based on that common interest, the research team proposed them an initiative of cultural entrepreneurship that ended up in forming a folk group, which had the opportunity to participate in the ‘Call for Incentives and Concertation: Culture Moves Us, Heritage Unites Us 2019’ according to law Resolution No. 139 of July 11, 2019; winning prizes and government support (results in: <file:///C:/Users/Nayosfi/Downloads/Resolucion%20No.157%20de%2025%20de%20julio%20de%202019.pdf>). A major achievement due to the fact that the government territorial entity —that manages public policies and resources for cultural heritage— realized the importance of this project, and organized several skill training courses for this group of young people in a vulnerable condition; giving them the opportunity to improve their reality.



**Image 2**

*Co - construction of Creative projects*



Note: Own development (2018-2019)

**Conclusions**

This doctoral research achieved a breakthrough towards the knowledge of subjectivities and resilient capacities of young people at risk; it allowed to gain its main objective on the generation of a *culture of peace* in young people at risk in Cartagena de Indias who are outside the educational system, through the design of educational strategies and the consolidation of proactive life projects, supported by their subjectivities, their resilient capacities and their cultural skills.

In addition, the development of a *Culture of Peace* implies understanding social interactions and varies ways of negotiation in order to face distress situations, avoiding violence to conceive a collective awareness for the achievement of common goals toward the construction of an ideal better society.

The development of *communal education dynamics* was strategic, which led the possibility to recognize identity aspects of this population group that also contributed to design their life projects.

The research team also recommends that similar studies should be carried out, not only in order to understand subjectivities and cultural codes of the youngsters population such as this in Cartagena de Indias, but also as a way to provide innovative solution —through productive projects— especially designed for young people in a vulnerable social condition.

### **Image 3**

#### *Dance and Percussion training and formation of a folk group*



Note: Own Development (2018-2019)

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