

# Youth itineraries, individuation, and reflexivities: approaches to social participation in low-income metropolitan neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study analyzes individuation itineraries by considering the forms of participation and reflexivity of young people who live in low-income neighborhoods in three metropolitan areas: Buenos Aires/Argentina, Porto Alegre/Brazil, and Santiago/Chile. For this, this study articulated the results of several empirical studies conducted from 2013 to 2019 with the conceptual tools in Danilo Martuccelli's sociology of the individual, especially its notions of tests, supports, and social textures. This research first addresses theoretical frameworks to implement its problem and methodological strategies to build and analyze youth's narratives. Then, it interpreted its data corpus around two central axes: a) low-income territories, actors, and interworlds and b) young people, social participation, and reflexivities. Young people face a plurality of material and symbolic coercions in several low-income territories. However, these territories also create collective spaces in which youths establish personal and group identifications as they discover or generate sports, artistic-political, and educational proposals, which create intergenerational bonds, recover ancestral knowledge, and build referential and reflective landmarks, transforming territorialities into supports and a sign of recognition. Thus, studying youth narratives offers a privileged tool to analyze Latin American low-income agencies and individualities.

## Keywords

Youth – Itineraries – Reflexivities – Individuation – Social participation.

**1-** The research conducted in Brazil was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel in Brazil (CAPES). Funding Code 001.

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<https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202349270569en>

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The social sciences have debated the configuration of individualizing practices in modern urban societies. Gilberto Velho (2000) stressed the pertinent emphasis on this matter, highlighting the contributions of Georg Simmel, Louis Dumont, Max Weber, among others, with reflections on the relative anonymity built in Western cities based on the multireferentiality and circulation they generate for individualized paths. Velho discussed the capitalist hierarchization and inequality that leads all people – particularly in *favelas* and low-income neighborhoods – to situations of racism, extreme violence, and scarce public policies; a condition that makes individuals question themselves about the field of possibilities at stake and the contextualization of individuation processes based on what particularizes them.

Thus, we draw near Danilo Martuccelli's propositions by especially considering his notions of "tests, supports, and social textures" based on research incursions in three metropolitan realities: Buenos Aires/Argentina, Porto Alegre/Brazil, and Santiago/Chile. We offer approaches to problematize common aspects of young people's experiences in low-income neighborhoods around the challenges they face in producing the territory in which they live. Then, from a common scenario and within the limits of this study, we seek to identify these people's forms of social participation and reflexivity.

Next, we describe the theoretical frameworks of our problematizations and analyze our methodological strategies and the narratives we built in this fieldwork, and (without intending to exhaust the subject) propose reflective dynamics based on the contextualized appropriation of symbols and meanings. In the concluding section, we suggest some reflections and hypotheses about the articulation between the mobilized coercions, supports, and textures and the reflexivities and agencies produced in young people's processes of individuation in low-income neighborhoods.

## **Theoretical frameworks**

Studies on youth have highlighted the diversity of experiences young people build, leading to the proposal that peer practices would form part of socialization processes co-produced by individuals based on biographical itineraries implemented in different social spaces (DI LEO; CAMAROTTI, 2013; DUBET; MARTUCCELLI, 1998; LEÃO; CARRANO, 2013; REGUILLO, 2012; TELLA, 2020). The approach in Danilo Martuccelli's contributions establishes theoretical and methodological inspirations for research in such a scenario, problematizing actions that young people develop along their itineraries.

Within the framework of the sociologies of the individual, Martuccelli (2010b) proposes we look at the structural "challenges" actors face and the ways that singularize the responses to these challenges. Rather than an inventory of individual biographies or actions, it configures a heuristic resource to resume the analysis of individuation of a given context produced historically and socially. The author's sociological research offers at least two fundamental concepts: "social tests" and "supports." The former informs us to what mobilizes individuals' efforts to constitute themselves as such in a given society to go beyond socio-institutional prescriptions, as did individualization theories (MARTUCCELLI, 2007, 2010b).

Martuccelli (2007) attributes four main characteristics to social tests. First, they offer a narrative dimension from which actors understand their itineraries and face constituent challenges as heirs to a properly modern adventure. Second, they allude to individuals' abilities to face such tests, generally considered as personal tasks. They also refer to the processes of social evaluation from which it is possible to observe response differentials and the resources effectively mobilized to face them. Finally, they are articulated to a series of compulsive and significant structural challenges within the framework of a society (whether institutionalized or related to the production of social ties), which vary according to historical periods.

In turn, the notion of supports exerts a complementary interpretive function aimed at the bases that sustain social actors' existence. The author proposes that we find the set of resources and supports that constitute experiences as an existential ecology of the elements participating in individuation processes, stressing that, rather than a question of a range of conditions and capitals available to social positions, it configures the recognition of what is inscribed in the web of effective interdependencies of individual histories (MARTUCCELLI, 2007).

It is worth briefly highlighting the author's propositions on individuation processes in Latin America so we can return to our analysis. Martuccelli (2010a) evaluates the hypothesis of the existence of "hyperactors" in Latin American societies. Individualities are built unlike the fiction of a social contract between preconceived individuals produced by organizations and institutional programs, as in Europe. However, societies in the South constitute individualities from the practices and skills of people who need, above all, to act and ensure their existence and recognition to belong to society; a condition that would partially stem from how power is established in our countries, which, unlike the North, is often indicated but only partially enforced – as the law, which is only sometimes enforced, varying according to circumstances and often by the use of violence. Since impersonal apparatuses offer no guarantees, maintaining social ties becomes essential to organize experiences. Thus, very delimited networks have historically sustained the trajectories of actors in their daily lives, rather than institutional programs exclusively.

These contributions on the conditions of individuals' agency in the face of social challenges help us to problematize the participation of young people. However, we must include elements Martuccelli (2005) offers about the "social ontology" in this debate so we can go beyond the notion of reflexivity. The author proposes that the following question be placed at the center of sociological research: "What are the sui generis characteristics the social possesses that always enable one to act otherwise?" (p. 8). Based on his theoretical and empirical research, he proposes a new answer: the existence of a malleable "social interworld" between individuals and structures:

[...] social life can be metaphorically described as an environment endowed with a permanent resistant malleability in the midst of variable malleability. Understanding how malleabilities work in theory and in practice is the goal of sociology. (MARTUCCELLI, 2009, p. 8).

The social interworld consists of two fundamental linked elements, separated only analytically: “textures” and “coercions.” The former addresses the cultural or symbolic domain: we live amidst a plurality of layers of meanings that are placed on top of each other and that we access in different ways, without being able to exhaust the cognizant possibilities of reality. On the other hand, coercions (usually classified sociologically into interior, material, interactive, or symbolic) operate in social life irregularly, i.e., they are exercised in only certain areas. They also have an intermittent action as, although in the same social scenario, they are active at some point in time and more tenuous or inactive at others. On the one hand, our analysis uses the notion of coercion to contextually delimit social tests. On the other hand, we drew inspiration from the proposal of the existence of textures in actors’ practices to analyze the identification of normative statements, symbolic devices, and/or referential frameworks encompassing agencies.

Reflective action (a type of monitoring) means including the social production of a given action in its course as its constitutive and explanatory element in everyday life (PINHEIRO; COLOMBO, 2021). Therefore, we work with the hypothesis that “reflexivity” configures and distinguishes the forms of construction of social action according to social actors’ experiences in the imbrication of contextual constraints, agencies, and referential frameworks. Thus, we work on recognizing the textures young people mobilize in their relationships with their territories and localized social participation and in the face of the struggles endured in their itineraries according to shared social tests. Thus, we seek to arrive at the approach of reflective dynamics in low-income neighborhoods.

The aforementioned finally leads us to a common condition we address in the three analyzed regions: “low income.” Despite its confusing limits, this notion enables us to highlight the potentiality of a certain relative cultural autonomy that is relatively, socially, and economically contextualized and articulated to create shared and singularized orientations. However, its incorporation as an analytical marker requires avoiding excessively idealized readings (of actors’ sociopolitical roles, for example) due to their risk of homogenizing individual or collective experiences in territories.

Araujo and Martuccelli (2015) propose a specific complementary notion, the concept of “low-income individualities.” We can consider it as a tool to set (from a meso-sociological analysis) articulations between structures and actors’ experiences. The authors build it from three interlinked major factors: a) shared cultural orientations – or as Daniel Míguez and Pablo Semán (2006) call it, the “general logic of cultural gestation” of subordinate sectors –; b) actors’ effective social experiences, which enable us to nuance and interpret historically the common normative orientations of this group in certain periods and society from a lower level of abstraction (ARAUJO, 2009); and c) low-income individuals’ initiatives and tactics, expressing an attitude that avoids entirely associating itself with either resistance or conformism (CERTEAU, 2010) and generates foundations for interpreting situations and people. Based on our results, this study will mainly address the last two dimensions, alluding to the first by referenced contextualizations. Given our interest in problematizing the social participation of young people from low-income sectors in the production of their territories and highlighting their reflexive derivations,

we will use youths' narratives to compare the references and interpretive inclinations actors build.

## **Methodological strategies**

Several techniques were used in our dialogues (questionnaires, discussion groups, etc.) and interviews were conducted at the end of these processes. In general, the production of conversations about young people's life itineraries were sought, pointing out the constituent tests of their daily lives. Thus, their relationship with the territory became an important theme for actors and a scenario of existential challenges.

Narratives were extracted from interviews conducted with residents of low-income neighborhoods from 2013 to 2019 and compared. In Porto Alegre/Brazil, peripheral neighborhoods in different regions (north, center-south, south, east) were chosen based on several inequality indicators (lower income, schooling, and housing rates) and a dialogue was established with 20 people aged from 18 to 29 years in their activity spaces according to the cultural and/or labor practices to which they were linked as producers. In these contexts, formed mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, "low-income" stems from young people's ongoing appropriations (in soccer, funk, hip hop, slam, social education, etc.), articulated to the narratives of their itineraries and the involved challenges, in which the knowledge of the Black matrix in music and poetry stands out.

In the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA)/Argentina, semi-structured interviews and biographical reports were conducted with 24 young people aged from 16 and 26 years who live in several low-income neighborhoods and belong to various institutions and social organizations. These urban settings (most of which in the southern Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area – commonly referred to as "settlements" or "villages") have grown since the 1970s (although their residents prefer to call them "neighborhoods" to avoid the stigma associated with other denominations) and show several forms of inequality, scarcity, and infrastructure and basic service precariousness. Many of its residents express their identification with these territories, defending and permanently demanding from the State the provision of the same urban conditions on medium and high socioeconomic neighborhoods – for the most part, located in the northern Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (CRAVINO, 2016).

In Santiago/Chile, research was conducted to collect information and group interviews were carried out with 24 youths aged from 18 to 25 years from low-income sectors in four communities and who belonged to social and territorial organizations. The information that was collected in these territories has a socio-historical identification with their origins in land grabs, self-built housing, and precarious or non-existent basic and community services, which are called "camps" and find an answer in social housing programs, whose young residents are often stigmatized by society and its surroundings (BAYÓN; ZABALETA, 2022).

The juvenile narratives constructed from these urban scenarios were transversally analyzed to identify common experiences (JOVCHELOVITCH, 2002) and characterize

coercions, diffracted social tests, and the mobilized supports and textures linked to the agencies of young people in low-income territories. A sociological analysis of the narrative corpus was performed, establishing connections between young people's narratives and their social space or, as Mills (1994) stated, our "sociological imagination" was used to capture the characteristics and links between biographies and history within societies in southern Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

## **Low-income territories, actors, and interworlds**

In the community there is no skate park, so people use street railings or put a box on the sidewalk. In fact, they practice on the street! They put a piece of wood to jump on top and everything. [Paulo, 29 years old, Porto Alegre, September/2016].

The aforementioned territories historically stem from real estate capital actions, the public power, and the populations that inhabit them in articulation with migratory flows between neighborhoods and especially from rural exodus associated with the industrialization and urbanization processes in Latin America in the 20th century (MAIOLINO; MANCEBO, 2005). Thus, neighborhoods converge social inequality markers and concentrate socially vulnerable groups.

The low-income neighborhoods in Porto Alegre, Buenos Aires, and Santiago articulate numerous experiences of symbolic discrimination, precarious urban infrastructure, and social vulnerability in different spaces and times. Especially regarding the last three decades, relationships with the territory begin to be narrated as a reference for violent circumstances. Narratives about the difficulties faced due to disputes over occupation by drug trafficking groups and confrontations with the police are common. These experiences become a field of tactics, which delimits spaces of circulation and action in the neighborhood and outside it, avoiding potential conflicts. Faced with these situations, our interlocutors strengthen (or establish) relationships of reciprocity to protect themselves from neighbors who control the points of sale of illicit drugs and from the police officers who especially harass young people.

Moreover, in these three urban centers, young people occupy (or dispute) squares, streets, social organizations, and school yards, participating in various artistic and sports activities with neighbors, relatives, and friends. As the specialized literature points out, the occupation of the public urban space includes enjoyment, the reverberations of "doing nothing," and the sentimentality of interactions and sociability, in which young people taste a sense of freedom and can build forms of socio-spatial appropriation (CARRANO, 2003; CHAVES, 2010; RAMÍREZ VARELA, 2019). In these neighborhoods, these places provide opportunities for the formation of bonds between peers and the integration into collective narratives about the places in which they live. Thus, they develop and mobilize different forms of supports (material, symbolic, and affective) that function as

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**5-** Throughout our research, the necessary ethical safeguards were adopted to preserve the anonymity, identity, and the moral, social, psychological, and cultural integrity of the youths who participated in an informed and voluntary manner and ensure the confidentiality of their responses.

social resistances or buffers and help them care for themselves, their affections, and their territories and sustain their existences (CAPRIATI, 2019).

In summary, we observed that the population in low-income contexts experiences stigmatization and segregation as an integral part of their place of residence and their relationship with the rest of the city and daily faces the limits of a lengthy and exhausting circulation in precarious and insufficient means of transport in long trips to work and/or study. Thus, we indicate what ARAUJO (2005) calls “territorialization” as the author characterizes the restrictions to the political and cultural enjoyment of the city by those segregated to the poorest regions. Rather than a mere consequence of social inequality, this phenomenon would configure a factor of reproduction and an obstacle to the democratic uses of the city. Thus marginalized, the inhabitants of low-income neighborhoods live an ambiguous sociability in their territories, between material precariousness and basic infrastructure and violence, on the one hand, and local cultural practices and community interactions, on the other.

In this scenario, young people from low-income neighborhoods inherit the historical spatial dynamics of Latin America, which involve city commodification and a series of disputes for public space without a significant or assimilable articulation to the classical notion of the public sphere and the egalitarian fiction related to the city. Spatial exclusion, inequality, and insecurity experiences are articulated with the phenomenon of urban fragmentation in a way that renders the recurrent territorial self-construction, daily inventiveness, and family and vicinal reciprocity in urban peripheries. A tension stems from the metropolitan and the local and the urban and territorialized common (SCHLACK; ARAUJO, 2022).

Thus, we can highlight two points from the description above. First, these territories are produced as relatively delimited places (geographically and symbolically) from their historical constitution, establishing structural restrictions to the “interworlds” of the social actors who inhabit them or, at least, interpose their relationship with the urban space of the neighborhood as a social test in relation to individuation. Thus, we must highlight the agentic condition of low-income and juvenile individualities, represented in their efforts to build and appropriate territories in the face of precarious resources and ambivalent power. It goes beyond only living, it implies constructing a set of practices and maintaining interactions that sustain coexistence, drawing actors to regularly act in their daily spaces and times.

To implement our analysis, we can relate these experiences to the figures of the “asymmetrical player,” the “vulnerable opportunist,” and the “metonymic actor” (MARTUCCELLI, 2010a). We observed, respectively, a certain “need for relational aesthetics that enable interactions” (p. 227); the cunning use of possibilities to confront vulnerability; and the ambivalence in relationships with institutional arenas placing individuals in a supposed contiguity and producing various appropriations or establishing practices that compensate for the scarcity of institution services.

The second point, derived from the previous one, concerns transforming the territory anchoring belonging and relational supports into a sign of narrative designation and identity, to which the expanded access to the “school form” (VINCENT; LAHIRE; THIN,

2001), cultural industry collaborations, and the uses of information and communication technologies contribute. In other words, especially among young people, territories become an arena of enunciative agency, and the textures linked to territorial experiences begin to significantly integrate symbolic disputes. From this, it is worth moving on to the theme of reflexivities.

## **Youth individualities, social participation, and reflexivities**

From the above, we understand the social participation of young people in low-income neighborhoods based on their territoriality. On the one hand, we find actors who are relatively limited to their neighborhoods and involved in the agentic production of their living spaces and sociability in the city. On the other hand, the signs of territorial identity appear in their interactions with the media and in the disputes of statements.

Thus, we deal with actors whose itineraries have been completely shaped in urban spaces and with increasing access to mass media (from TV to the Internet) in comparison to their ancestors' trajectories. In fact, since the 1980s, we can consider the production of a low-income international culture linked to the generation of a global consumer market (ORTIZ, 2007) that transmits social memory by cultural industry icons. Since the fragmentation of social relations in metropolitan urban spaces, the cultural market and especially information and communication technologies function as a type of social regulator and a significant space for the formation of the public sphere in Latin America (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2017).

I don't know! Things weren't good for me in Funk. It changed when I joined the School of MCs [a community social project]. There I could be whatever I wanted. Sabha [an MC and educator] was about the favela; the slang I knew he knew; people talked a lot. We were from the same place, from the same streets [...].

Funk doesn't judge you because Funk likes your life story, what you've been through, and what you want to take forward. But if you tell your story in a job interview to your co-workers... Will you be welcome? No, you won't!

[Gabriel, 20 years old, Porto Alegre, October/2019].

As mentioned, the occupation of squares, streets, and school yards is one of the ways of living in the neighborhood, carrying out artistic and sports activities. Free time gives young people opportunities to create bonds between peers, from which they can integrate collective narratives about the places in which they live. They narrate memories of events in various places, configuring chronotopic records that overflow with everyday stigmatizations and support a struggle to appropriate space. However, we also found individual experiences and reflexivities in public organizations and institutions, as per some spaces for education and socio-labor training in Buenos Aires. References in such places are also present and configure their practices according to the established interactions.

The analysis of these itineraries indicates that if the relationship with the territory is imposed as a challenge and/or sign of identification for individuals, participation in it may vary according to the developed practices (soccer, funk, hip hop, street art, basketball,

capoeira, educational practices, etc.) and the local conjunctures of violence, gender conditions<sup>6</sup>, and *in situ* possibilities of social recognition<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, rather than always happening explicitly in the political sphere, participation is configured in the scope of agency by enjoyment and circulation, the maintenance/creation of ties of reciprocity/support, and daily ethical-moral disputes.

However, participation is associated with emerging spaces contesting the system (as we saw especially in Santiago) as a response to the disconnection of the political class and the state apparatus with the realities of low-income youth. So, these people belong to these local community spaces as articulations aimed at immediate and near needs. The feeling of exclusion – often because several political, institutional, and social spheres ignore them – leads young people to position their forms of expression and mobilize themselves in territorial organizations.

Our group interviews with young people from various cultural and territorial organizations in the low-income neighborhoods of different communities of the Metropolitan Region of Santiago evinced the construction of an identification with the territory and the need to create spaces for participation, stemming from their involvement in situations and decisions affecting their lives, in which concepts and categories differ from traditional ones as they are based on their own constructions of reality by the forms of socialization that developed them. Young people have different visions of citizenship and insertion in their locality and society. Thus, participation focuses on local spheres and common interests linked to the sociocultural expressions with which they are identified and from which they create foundations of social transformation:

Just as today we are trying to have an active participation in the social, political, cultural, I am getting very involved with what is community culture. We use hip-hop as a tool for social transformation. We fully believe that art itself is a fundamental tool for development, self-discovery, and development from the spiritual to the social. So, we're also struggling to gain space in cultural politics. [Pato, 25 years old, Santiago, November/2018].

Dissatisfaction with the political class also includes the representation by formal community organizations, which consider themselves uninterested in the actions young people can create in their territories and often stress an adult-centric vision. Some participants also recognize that the community fails to always receive their actions well either due to lack of communication and information or due to ignorance of the expressions of youth culture as a form of participation.

The configuration of reflective dynamics (whether based on politically interested actions or not) can also tell us something. Itineraries show that engagement with peer-to-peer practices also refers to a narrative celebration of events, in which actors

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**6-** Due to the limits of this study, it was impossible to further develop all analytical possibilities, including the dimensions of gender and race-ethnicity, which we only mention as constituent elements of evidence and supports. Future publications may develop the singularization of these analyses.

**7-** Street practices are more accessible to young men. Violent situations are felt mainly by the women in these neighborhoods. During periods of conflict, known neighbors and some professionals (educators, for example) can facilitate circulation.

share (including texts and images on social media) tastes, cultural icons, activities, and overcome difficulties in a referential way in interactive appropriations. In addition to a complementary activity, narration singularizes moments and stimulates bonds. We especially refer to a reflective work around everyday life and community or identity. We simultaneously find a practical and aesthetic dynamic, configured as an interactive and narrative modality (a certain “telling for”) and pending recognition, whose most obvious expression refers to the informal authorship of slam poetry, funk, or rap.

Still anchored in the narrative tone and increasingly resorting to information and communication technologies, collective artistic productions modulate versions about territoriality. In Brazil, for example, especially from the last decade of the last century onward, young people call their relationship with the territory into question by making it a theme and object of identity and narrating it in an intercommunity way. They often do this by evoking ethnic-racial belongings involved in the historical processes of territorialization (BURGOS, 2005), as in their criticisms of urban racial segregation and the valorization of Black ancestral origin in Porto Alegre and other places (MARCON, 2020; TELLA, 2020).

If we specifically take the experiences of young activists, we find common itineraries related to structural work, school, or family conditions and involvement with social practices: beginning with enjoyment between peers, often from existing neighboring and cultural networks, which offer supports for action and recognition. However, activist practice distinguishes itself by the signs of interpretation and justification it provides, adding elements of “criticality”<sup>8</sup> derived from cultural knowledge of Black matrices and/or close to the field of social movements<sup>9</sup>. Thus, maintaining the reflexive configuration of narrative inclination and continuing allusions to everyday life and individualities, these practices introduce notions with a clearly political aspect and identity, such as, for example, allusions to the Afro-descendant nation, Black ancestry, social exploitation, class position, and social rights.

However, it is worth mentioning that adherence to activist statements, such as hip hop for example, is inscribed according to the possibilities actors find to envision conditions to overcome their challenges in networks of movements. So, understanding reflective dynamics should consider supports. If lyrics and rhythms enable aesthetic connections and interpretive signs of what young people face in social reality, adherence includes a participation device referring to authorship among peers, producing spaces that recognize actors and their art and include their arguments. Moreover, activism means integrating agency networks that range from the construction of moments of collective musical production and enjoyment to the generation of income by the creation of community projects.

We can advance the characterization of the forms of individual reflexivity in these contexts for which the narratives produced in Buenos Aires and in the institutional

**8-** For Boltanski (2014), “critical reflexivity” acts on the incongruities between institutional devices and experiences and offers “tests of reality,” i.e., justifications for changing the framework of social reality and reaching the world it often fails to recognize.

**9-** Hip hop was initially established as a cultural practice in the working-class neighborhoods of New York City in the 1970s among young Black and Caribbean people. It gathers the artistic expressions of rap, graffiti, breakdancing, and DJing. Its political-cultural appropriation is observed in the Brazilian metropolises from the 1980s onward (OLIVEIRA; SILVA, 2004).

spaces are iconic. In the accounts of their experiences, young people develop various forms of reflexivity around three interconnected central nuclei: “discovery,” “trust,” and “transformation.”

On the one hand, young people narrate very significant life events that happened in these interworlds – mainly led by some of the institutional agents –that enabled new possibilities in their lives. These narratives revolve around “discovery:” finding places and people completely different from those that daily frequent their neighborhoods. The public institutions to which they have access<sup>10</sup> configure exceptions, refuges in which they choose to participate daily (because they feel recognized), and which help them face two central social tests: neighborhood and schooling. They find various material, affective, and symbolic supports in these spaces, such as new bonds with youths and adults and references of interpretation and repertoires of non-violent and non-discriminatory actions, from which they express themselves and create critical thoughts in the face of other institutional and existential scenarios of their social world.

Youths’ relationships of “trust” with professors and institution references become possible when the latter are willing to listen to the former and treat and recognize them as subjects. Young people signify its emergence as true moments of inflection in their institutional experiences that foster new intersubjective bonds and ties to public institutions. These openings, intersubjective encounters, and trust relationships enable the institutionalization of “ethical-subjective” social climates: dialogical and participatory scenarios where students construct their individualities in open processes of identification in which others occupy a central place. In these spaces, young people especially value the possibility of being heard, debating, reflecting critically, and planning and implementing various projects to collectively transform institution and neighborhood realities, thus resignifying and strengthening their territorial identities.

When narrating their experiences in these institutional spaces, some youths point out several significant events that marked a “before” and an “after,” a biographical turn from which they “transform” their referential landmarks, reflexivities, and practices around themselves, other people, and institutions. As a result of her participation in a low-income college, Carla managed to end a relationship that limited her possibilities of agency:

[At the low-income school] I was reunited with myself, and, for me, this was very good because I realized a lot of things that I felt and that I could not understand at that moment, and I began to understand them when I saw that I had restrictions. They explained to me that there was something else than, I don’t know, than washing dishes and taking care of my daughter at home. I became much more independent and found myself for real. [Carla, 24 years old, Buenos Aires, March/2018].

This encounter with herself is valued mainly by Carla and other young women as it enables them to face the tests related to the domestic space, the tasks of family care, and

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**10** - The institutions in which we conducted research in Buenos Aires include two low-income schools (self-managed high schools), a social circus, a vocational training cooperative, and a high school with an inclusive project.

submission to their partners, who often use hegemonic sex-gender coercions (ELIZALDE, 2015; FAUR; PEREYRA, 2018). However, in her high school, Carla could rebuild her self-esteem as a woman and redefine her projects and dreams; in Ricoeur’s (1996) words, what for her is worthwhile, “good life.”<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1** - Youth, social participation, and reflexivities in low-income territories

Low-income regions	Coercions	Supports	Agencies in participation	Mobilized textures
Porto Alegre	Material and urban infrastructure precariousness; Scarce basic services in the neighborhood; Stigmatization and segregation of local residents; Need to move to distant locations; Anonymity and violence on the streets (police and drug trafficking groups).	Collective leisure, recreation, sport, and/or social education initiatives; Public schools (physical and moral safety/care); Community or peripheral narratives; Black matrix knowledge, practices, and belonging; Family, neighbor, or friendly reciprocity and/or sociability networks; Means of communication, exchanges, and mimesis of practices.	Occupation/dispute of squares and streets for practices between peers (sociability, arts, and sport); Informal social education activities; Individual or collective tactics for urban circulation; Dissimulation of origins for interaction in the city; Production of own emblems for recognition.	Community and biographical chronotopic milestones; Representations of fear and risk on the street; Statements about marginality; Knowledge about Black ancestry. Notions of the peripheral and Black condition.
Buenos Aires	Internal and external symbolic, corporeal, and material boundaries Scarce materials in basic services and infrastructure Streets as a violent and unsafe scenario.	Meeting and sociability between family and peers. Personal and group identification with the neighborhood. Struggles for protection and collective affirmation in the face of threats and attacks from outside Sports and cultural offers.	Search and construction of collective refuges in the face of scarcity, violence, and insecurities. Mobility strategies inside and outside the neighborhood.	Discovery: new intergenerational bonds and repertoires of action. Trust: intersubjective dialogue and critical reflexivity. Transformation: reference marks.
Santiago	Distrust in institutions. Disengagement from the political class. Community unawareness of their actions. Streets and territories as spaces of identity both violent and risky.	Insertion in local spaces. Common interests and sociability among peers. Initiatives to socially transform the environment.	Construction of spaces for participation. Aim to consolidate territorial spaces and recognition starting from the institutional.	Street art and urban culture as a tool for social transformation. Statements around marginality and commitment to the community.

Source: Data from research conducted by the authors.

**11-** According to Paul Ricoeur (1996), “good life” is the cloud of ideals and dreams of fulfillment regarding a life each individual considers as more or less realized or unrealized. “It is the plane of ‘time lost’ and of ‘time regained.’” (p. 184-185).

Table 1 shows that the participation of young people configures itself in relation to the coercions of material and infrastructure precariousness and from the material and symbolic segregations in the city. They are also based on the construction of ties of reciprocity and struggle and the production of statements and narratives of belonging and recognition. Thus, their experiences in sports, artistic, political, or educational initiatives in the neighborhood function as supports. These actions contribute to the agentic construction of spaces of collective permanence and enjoyment that are equally articulated to the mobilization or co-production of textures that enable new meanings, tactics, and projections in the face of the test of the territory.

From then on, we can designate as a common challenge to young people the very circulation through the streets and neighborhoods, the confrontation of symbolic borders in the city, and the daily production of the place of residence and belonging in the face of the precariousness of their localities. In articulation with this test, we distinguish the characteristic of juvenile territorial reflexivities: the narrative reconfiguration of their experiences in their neighborhoods from the interactive generation of counterstigmatizing territorial meanings and referential frameworks of change (personal and/or collective).

## **Final considerations**

This study sought to problematize common aspects of the experiences of young people in low-income neighborhoods, especially the challenges they face in the territories in which they live. After understanding their common conditions and agencies, we drew some conclusions about the links between the relational consistencies in these territories, their processes of individuation, and their forms of participation and reflexivity.

In the low-income neighborhoods in Porto Alegre, Buenos Aires, and Santiago (the areas in which we carry out our fieldwork), young people face a plurality of material and symbolic coercions at different times in their lives: precarious and insufficient housing, services, and basic urban infrastructures; scarce or low-intensity links with social services and public health and education institutions; various forms of stigmatization, segregation, insecurity, and violence from other inhabitants and police officers inside and outside their neighborhoods. However, in these territories, youths also create daily networks, spaces for interaction with their peers and their affections; they build personal and group identifications, discover or create sports, artistic-political, and educational proposals in which they can update themselves and create intergenerational bonds and repertoires of action and recover ancestral knowledge anchored in their peripheral and/or Black condition.

The fragilities and discontinuities in public policies and institutional anchors force these people to permanently activate and mobilize their families, friendships, neighborhoods, and multiple material, symbolic, and especially affective supports to build and defend precarious refuges and social buffers that help sustain and project their existences. These “territorialized” living conditions (BURGOS, 2005; SCHLACK; ARAUJO, 2022) and the identified agencies demand that we change the notion of participation (which is usually conceived in conventional political-institutional dynamics) to focus on

the forms of action created by low-income young people to meet their needs and take advantage of public spaces (RAMÍREZ VARELA, 2019).

The allusion to the notion of “hyperagency” (MARTUCCELLI, 2010a) helped us to understand the activities of low-income neighborhood actors, who, among our interlocutors, mix a tactical dispute for basic resources and for the right to the city and the struggle for recognition. Young people implement a set of individual and collective actions and signs based on spaces of participation and artistic creation in which they resignify, criticize, and reformulate their referential frameworks (what is worth living) and seek to transform their social environments. Thus, we can evoke “firmness of character” and a “sense of opportunity” (ARAUJO; MARTUCCELLI, 2015) as characteristics that narratives bring with a relational aesthetic that sustains individual existences and social ties. We can see this in expressions such as “attitude” in hip hop or in the recurrent searches for educational and associative alternatives in the territories, a situation that continuously highlight the vulnerability (or the feeling of institutional abandonment) that makes it necessary to find the means to move forward in close ties.

We also observed that youths’ experiences inflect the referential frameworks and textures that form their social interworlds. Thus, they generate displacements from places of stigma and new possibilities of being together. Reflexivities undergo (re)configuration when, during the search for alternatives to everyday coercions, young people find, combine, or create relational supports and symbolic and cultural textures. Rather than necessarily configuring a rupture, this narrative oscillation, although dependent of the cunning and existential sense of individual firmness, involves struggles for individual and community recognition of their identities, transforming their territorialized/segregated condition into a symbolic support for integration/belonging and circulation through the city. In these youth experiences and reflexivities, information and communication technologies can support the interaction and production of references from a global scenario and act on a certain notion of personal or collective change that tells us more about the present than about the future, more about the work of individuals to recover time and hope, thus denying places of stigma and creating possibilities to be together in the city against the intense metropolitan flow or contextual inconsistency.

Thus, as a closure and opening, we assume some hypotheses: textures become significant in the experiences of individuals if they are anchored in the social challenges they must face in their lives. Thus, the symbolic and referential landmarks that transform gazes and horizons appear in the mediations and inscriptions that reach intersubjective connections, but actors’ reflective work still occupies a central place as a self-effort inserted in significant networks of action, justification, and recognition. Thus, we understand that the study of youth narratives constitutes a privileged locus to characterize and analyze agencies, reflexivities, and low-income individualities in Latin American societies.

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*Received on: 12.20.2022*

*Revised on: 03.14.2023*

*Approved on: 04.24.2023*

**Editor:** Professor Marília Pinto de Carvalho

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