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# Projects carried out by social institutions focused on young people: fragmented activities and disengagement of the government'

Projetos voltados aos jovens em instituições sociais: atividades fragmentadas e desresponsabilização do poder público

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## Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze projects carried out by social institutions aimed at young people. We performed a qualitative research conducted by interviews with employees of these institutions (private ones, but with public-funded projects). These projects had compensatory features and were developed through actions at different institutions, with the main purpose of responding to situations experienced by groups “at risk”. The projects had an identification with a supposed classist conception of education, which reinforced the legitimacy of the social position of “needy” young people in the social hierarchy. Facing the limits exposed requires radical changes that induce fractures in the ideology of control and tutelage of the State, promoting reorganizations that favor human emancipation.  
**Keywords:** Youth; Adolescence; Social Policy; Social Investment Projects.

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## Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar ações desenvolvidas por instituições sociais com projetos voltados a jovens. Utilizou-se como metodologia a pesquisa qualitativa realizada por meio de entrevistas com trabalhadores dessas instituições (privadas e financiadas por verbas públicas). Os projetos desenvolvidos tinham características compensatórias e eram operacionalizados por meio de ações pulverizadas em diferentes instituições, com a finalidade primordial de responder a situações vivenciadas por grupos “de risco”. Os projetos identificavam-se com uma concepção de educação veladamente classista, que reforçava a legitimação da posição social do jovem “carente” na hierarquia social. O enfrentamento dos limites expostos exige mudanças radicais que provoquem rupturas com a ideologia de controle e de tutela dos jovens pelo Estado e promovam reorganizações que favoreçam a emancipação humana. **Palavras-chave:** Juventude; Adolescência; Política Social; Projetos de Investimento Social.

## Introduction

In Latin America, the development of policies related to youth has been determined by problems arising in the social exclusion of part of young people as a way to facilitate their integration into the adult world, and in response to social conflicts and interests. The first programs, inaugurated in the 1950s, developed actions aimed at the expansion of education and occupation of the spare time, consistent with the more general social policies of the states, which had universal characteristics in the context of growing economy and high availability of external credit, which lasted until the early 1980s, when the reforms of the States determined a drastic reduction in public expenses with social policies. Since then, governments have proposed, without the character of state youth policy, containment programs aimed at the population affected the most by social adjustments, with actions aimed at fighting poverty and the prevention of offenses, mainly run by non-governmental institutions, the NGOs (Abad, 2002).

In terms of more general state policies, the Brazilian State has followed this neoliberal trend, including the juvenile segment, with variations in the implementation of projects that were more or less increased according to the characteristics of the local government.

Particularly in the city of Santo André, the municipal government developed projects aimed at the youth segment of the popular sectors already in the 1970s, and between 1990 and 2000, successive municipal administrations have encouraged and effected the progressive development of experiences gained in different projection spaces, both in national and international contexts (Almeida, 2001).

However, this study considered the assumption that this progressive trend has not been implemented, and that the projects for young people in the city converged with the needs of the neo-liberalism itself.

## Methods

This study used qualitative methods consistent with the characteristics of the object studied in accordance with the theoretical milestone that guided

the study developed in the city of Santo André, metropolitan region of the state of São Paulo.

The institutions contacted were those contained in registers of the *Conselho Municipal do Direito da Criança e do Adolescente* (Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents - CMDCA) and the *Conselho Municipal de Assistência Social* (Municipal Social Assistance Council - CMAS). These records were checked and supplemented by the *Conselho Municipal de Juventude* (Municipal Council of Youth - CMJ) and by advisors from CMDCA and CMAS.

Eleven institutions out of the forty-two identified constituted the empirical field, since these are the ones that continued with active projects and accepted to participate in the research.

The interviews, the data collection instrument, were previously scheduled and carried out within the institutions, with one worker indicated in each one of them. Therefore, it was assumed that the respondent was the worker who could best describe the characteristics of the institutional project.

The script that guided the interview questions for identifying characteristics of the institution had the questions that allowed for addressing the purpose, objectives, and characteristics of the projects and actions developed.

The interviews were analyzed considering the institutions according to their proposals for action and the characteristics of the projects and actions developed by them.

The study complied with the ethical principles recommended by the National Council of Research Ethics, approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the School of Nursing at the University of São Paulo and the Municipal Secretary of Health of Santo André, being its realization authorized by the Municipal Secretariat of Health in Santo André.

## Analysis of the results and discussion

The social institutions that developed projects aimed at young people in Santo André were mostly of private initiative and recognized as of public utility, qualification awarded in the country to civil societies, associations, and foundations.

A significant part of the funding came from public bodies, both by direct incentives - grants, donations, tax exemption, providing internships and human resources, as well as indirect benefits, granted by the so-called partner institutions, typically private companies.

The agreements between the institutions and the municipal executive body were made mainly by the Social Inclusion Secretariat that emphasizes the welfare-oriented quality of the actions.

This responsibility grant from social protection mechanisms of the youth segment to the third sector was analyzed as a result of the reorganization of the State, which is in line with the statement of Abad (2002) that the neo-liberal trend incited the encouragement of the privatization of public services and focusing social policies for the sectors that are more excluded from access to work and the consumption of goods.

In Brazil, the federal government committed itself to highlight the juvenile population as the object of specific programs, focused on the National Youth Secretariat and the National Youth Council. Sposito et al. (2005) have analyzed that the projects were oriented to the insertion of young people in the world of work through actions and compensatory featured projects, allocated mostly in the outskirts of the big cities, and many of them were developed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which have mushroomed in the country.

One of the respondents signaled this logic, which is reproduced by the municipal government of Santo André: *"As the State cannot handle it yet, right? We hope that one day it will be able to do it, but it does not yet, so we are partners [...] and the charities will still function as protagonists for a long time"* (E5).

The responsibility for the financing of actions aimed at young people, mainly by public bodies, and usually allocated in assistance, inclusion, and social action related secretariats was referred to by Sposito et al. (2006) when verifying that the official programs did not count with the participation of society and young people themselves in their preparation.

It should be highlighted that this mechanism reinforces the ideology that the qualification of

poor teenagers to work overcomes the difficulty in accessing employment or minimum benefits for their survival.

The respondents reported that the projects developed within the institutions were predefined and adapted to financing tenders, especially from the federal government. They were specific and temporary projects, developed by workers temporarily hired, since they relied on transfers of public and private funds that intermittently occurred. The respondents were unaware of any kind of monitoring of projects by the city of Santo André, although most of the institutions were enrolled in municipal councils.

The registry did not require consideration of the institutions; on the contrary, it only resulted in the exemption of the employer's tax quota and in receiving food from the Municipal Food Bank program. Following the same logic, the purpose of the register in federal agencies was just getting legal advice to covenants and donations.

We also noted that no link existed between social institutions, nor within the intentions they had, that is, no proposal for intersector actions was made. The effectiveness of referrals made was due to the subjects involved, and no monitoring or evaluation of the effectiveness of the procedure occurred.

It was possible to perceive the focusing of projects by the proportion of young citizens served by the programs. Approximately 3,000 people were covered per year, out of 53,878 young people between 15 and 24 years old residing in the city in 2010 (IBGE, 2014).

In general, no plurality of actions was observed, nor significant differences between the projects of the institutions, but a set of fragmented proposals based mostly in the design of youth as a problem-related step. All projects identified with the aim of occupying the free time of young people during the week, to get them out of idleness, of streets or of unprotected spaces, spaces which, for social groups to which the projects were directed, would represent risk of development of a "deviant" behavior, as expressed in the following excerpt:

*my goal as an educator is [...] to forward them to the job market, a lot better than slinging, or*

*Becoming a drug user [...]. The focus is to keep children and adolescents engaged in any activity [...], maybe he has not learned that activity, but he learned there that the most important thing is to be a man of character, to get out of there with his head held high [...]. Society itself offers risks, either you are a guy with a good head or you will get involved, and the goal of this program is that young people detect what is not good [...] So that is one of our goals, he didn't go to the drug world, didn't go to the criminal world, he got something else because of the project (E3).*

The projects were aimed at young people with very low household income, and sought to control the risks identified as youth-related to some extent, such as those linked to unprotected sex, unemployment and, often, of involvement with drugs, especially the illicit ones - from consumption to traffick. None of the respondents considered, however, that some of these risks, such as unemployment, were only considered as such when associated with young people from poor families.

All respondents mentioned a risk factor as a prerequisite for the admission of young in the projects of the institutions, which used interviews with the beneficiaries and their parents. Some institutions performed ranking tests, home visits, and required documents evidencing the economic and financial deficiency of the family (maximum income between two and four minimum wages or receiving aids such as *Bolsa Família*).

Therefore, the projects were restricted to young people from poor families, young people "in need", as the respondents named them.

*So, one of the criteria was: they must be studying; another one was: the needy condition must be evidenced, it goes through an assessment of the place where they live, of the conditions in which they live, and the family income too, but that depends a lot on the observation of the professional that will make the selection [...]. So, their selection goes through a visit, an interview with the family, the fathers, mothers (E2).*

Respondents described the participation in projects as essential for the insertion in the labor market, as in the following statement:

*They need organizational behavior, they will work in a company, they have to understand that there is a hierarchy, bureaucracy, an organization chart, a certain behavior that will be required of them within the company; the way they will express themselves in labor relations, it is important that they are aware of this discipline [...]. [The activities] are all geared to let them know how to position themselves according to what the market somehow will require from them [...], we don't have the idea of shaping, but they also have to understand that if it is not like that they are out. The market will require some things from them. So they have to have self-awareness, social class consciousness, this is extremely important (E5).*

Among the respondents there was a minority who considered that different material conditions of life enabled different accesses to young people; thus, to different destinations. However, the explanation of this inequality was associated with the lack of individual effort of young people and their families, naturalizing such social inequality. It was almost unanimous among respondents that the lack of self-esteem was the main target of the projects, to strengthen the desire to work and effort to carry it out, as the following excerpts evidence:

*the environment that they live is very hostile, there is a lot of violence, aggression, unmotivated parents, abandonment. They arrive here without any perspective, not feeling able for anything [...] So, we do everything we can, our proposal is to basically rescue their self-esteem: you can do it, you are able, [...] find out which are your abilities. We have noticed in young people today the lack of motivation. Motivation comes from within the creature, [...] thus working their feelings, facing the human being and seeing how you will motivate this creature (E7).*

*The specific objective is to increase the self-esteem of adolescents and their families [...], to*

*implement and to enhance self-esteem, so that they can act, create (E3).*

The statements of the employees of the institutions corroborated the ideology of individual accountability, which refers to the private forum and search for satisfaction of needs of social reproduction, being the individual imputed the competence to understand and take advantage of opportunities.

The possibility of a better future for the youth in the project has also been attributed to the individual commitment of the worker, as the following statement expressed:

*I believe in human beings, believe that it is possible by simplicity, love, and dedication. So, there are moments that are discouraging when you know someone gets involved with drugs [...] that they are not coming anymore [...], it seems you are not doing anything. Gee, I pushed myself, I worked with him so hard and now what, right? (E7).*

For Dayrell et al. (2007), the commitment and the involvement of educators and sociability in the daily life are one of the few pillars that ensure that the programs have a positive impact for young people. A similar finding was made by Amarante et al. (2007), in a study of the health area, on the youth in the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Unified Health System - SUS). The practices aimed at young people were punctual and casuistry in nature. The workers that participated in them made it on their own initiative and generally for having some affinity with the population.

Therefore, the belief in the strategies of strengthening of self-esteem was evident in the testimony of workers, since they argued that the job was a result of individual effort.

Such strategies can also be associated with what Gentili (apud Mészáros, 2008) called “education for unemployment”, i.e., which transmits the ideology that replaces the work as a social right for employability, thus transferring the responsibility from the State to the individual.

This ideology was clearly expressed in the activities most cited by the respondents: the lectures and classes, developed along the lines of professional



training courses or educational activities defined by the availability of human and financial resources or by the skills of volunteers.

None of the respondents mentioned spaces in the projects for young people in which they could express their needs or demands, in such a way they could interfere in the definition of the projects and activities. On the contrary, young people participated in actions previously defined by the capacity of the institutional offer.

The courses taught, lasting from six months to two years, were aimed at the training for the development of manual activities requiring low educational qualification and that would be mainly carried out in the informal market such as the manicure and hairdresser courses. There were also courses reported for the preparation of the curriculum and lectures on “good manners” to behave in interviews in the “partner companies”.

Such projects promised especially some professional training, and even if they did not reach the promise of forwarding to the labor market, stability, or social mobility, these projects enabled some individuals to access the market due to the few jobs available, and reproduced the docking ideology of the “dysfunctional” ones. Despite the good intentions, these programs sought to explicitly or implicitly contain the risks of young regulars, keeping them out of the streets and occupying their idle hands.

Therefore, the programs corroborated the focus of the projects in young people considered fragile or with potential risk to “deviant” behaviors, concepts coming from State policy guidelines, which, as analyzed by Sposito et al. (2003), were not universal, but directed to poor teenagers, aiming not to guarantee rights, but rather to control them.

In addition to the trainings, sporadic activities were cited as mentioned in the following excerpt:

*We promote the culture and leisure week, [...] It's a week to unwind. As we made the week of professions, we make a whole working with speakers, they will bring games, balls, so we're going to do a job by encouraging the sport issue, we're programming (E2).*

The activities developed by these institutions much resembled the results described by Abramo (1997) by stating that the majority of Brazilian programs developed activities related to non-formal education, occupational workshops, and activities that promoted, in particular, sports and art, or professional training programs for forwarding to the labor market, without promoting any kind of qualification.

Probably, for the young people of these projects, the sociability spaces were restricted to family, to the public school in the neighborhood, and to the attended institutions. As Dayrell et al. (2007) mentioned, the young people who attend these projects are denied other public spaces, such as the streets, seen as dangerous spaces, related to doom and destruction.

A project financed by external capital, directed to the subject of the environment, distinguished from the others. The actions were linked to improvements in the external aspect of popular house condominiums, restricted to planting trees and painting tables and benches in common areas of the condominiums, located in a poor neighborhood and little served by infrastructure resources. The respondent expressed the idealization that activities to improve aspects of the condominium, while encouraging the change of perception of youth as a problematic step, could, at the same time, prevent behaviors considered of risk for young people.

*What we want is young people to have the opportunity to be protagonists, to change where they live, to see who has the ability to organize with others and change for the better the environment of the neighborhood where they live, this is the main objective... and society sees young people not only as a problem, but people that can be a force in their community [...] We know young people when you look at the statistics - violence, criminality, we experience that at the site, we see young people dying right before us [...] They are not bringing anything to the young people, green areas, proposals, they are bringing FEBEM, it is an inconsistency (E9).*

It was, however, a project that differed from others only regarding the theme addressed and the source of funding, being aligned to more general characteristics of projects recommended by state policies analyzed by Sposito et al. (2005) whose focus were the slums, marked by the absence of public services and linked to the expectation of contrast that is not required of young people from other social classes.

The precariousness of the living conditions of young people who participate in the projects, in addition to a precarious formal education and limited social participation, keep the young people and their families in a cycle of many restrictions that hinders the development of a future project or of solidarity and collective solutions for problems, even among young people who are inserted into formal education and that get some work (Lachtim et al., 2009).

None of the institutions had the evaluation of the results or any systematic impact measurement, but there was evidence that the ability to really carry out the insertion and the permanence of the youngster in the job. The few young people granted were inserted into companies that hired them as interns for a year to develop activities requiring low training and that did not enable them for production activities.

Although this study did not aim to evaluate the impact of the projects on the lives of young regulars at the institutions, it captured, in the accounts of the respondents, the description of possible strengthenings for young people, always beside the individual efforts from employees or volunteers, related to opportunities for exchange of experiences and sociability that projects could provide and the possibility of financial compensation, which allowed certain achievements, especially in the context of consumption. However, we analyzed that they are only a survival strategy before such precarious conditions of social reproduction.

Dias et al. (2007) qualified such projects as “poor for the poor”, and Sposito et al. (2005) concluded that they place a young people at a social subordinate position, in which the transfer of income linked to the contrast may be a new form of domination, obscured by the discourse of social integration and citizenship, while the access to income extends the

possibilities of any achievement in the context of consumption.

Instead of actions focusing on some troubled youth segments, Sposito et al. (2006) argue that the actions should portray a comprehensive policy towards social rights for the youth.

## Final Remarks

The assumption stated by this study was real, as it is possible to see that the youth-driven projects in the city of Santo André accompanied more general trends in Brazil, which had a liberal and peripheral character. These trends were confirmed in the characterization of the actions, developed in a fragmentary way in different institutions, such as proposals for projects that were taking as a primordial purpose the answer, to some extent, to the situations experienced by young people belonging to the so-called risk groups. They were, however, activities that stimulated competitive and individualistic social relations.

There are strong indications that the projects developed by the social institutions aimed at young citizens were instruments for the internalization of an ideology that legitimizes the position they and their families occupy in the social hierarchy, as well as socially established expectations for the appropriateness of their conduct.

The projects developed by social institutions aimed at young people in the city of Santo André had also some possible strengthenings, linked to the receipt of financial compensation, in the form of benefits from grants paid by compensation of activities carried out by young people in so-called “partner institutions,” and to the personal effort of staff and volunteers. However, there was a veiled classist education, whose primary purpose was to ensure the internalization of general parameters of the system itself.

To counteract this trend, Mészáros (2008) signals the urgent need for a consciously classist education that produces “counter-internalization” and does not get stuck in denial, creating a concrete alternative.

The confrontation of the exposed limits requires radical changes, which cause disruption with the



ideology of control and protection of youth by the State and promote reorganizations favoring human emancipation.

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### Authors' contribution

Heitor Martins Pasquim is the author of the masters' research that originated this article, guided by Célia Maria Sivalli Campos. Heitor Martins Pasquim, Célia Maria Sivalli Campos, and Cassia Baldini Soares participated in the final writing of the article.

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