

Life projects of adolescents under social educative measure of confinement

Projetos de vida de adolescentes em medida socioeducativa de internação

Proyectos de vida de adolescentes en medida socioeducativa de internamiento

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Abstract: This research characterizes life projects of adolescents deprived of their liberty due to the commission of offenses. It is a multiple case study conducted through four focus groups, which had twenty-five adolescents as participants. The adolescents were aged between 15 and 19 years old and were confined in juvenile detention centers in the Metropolitan Regions of Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Data were treated by thematic analysis and systematic procedures were used for differentiating the cases. There were two ways of conceiving future among participants: 1) with life projects associated to crime, which included a clear sense of action for the future; and 2) with future aspirations related to education, family, and work, but without a sense of action by which one attempted to achieve such aspirations. The results suggest that the social educative system is infective in promoting healthy life projects.

Key words: life projects, adolescents in conflict with the law, social educative measures, deprivation of freedom, antisocial behavior

Resumo: O objetivo desta pesquisa é caracterizar projetos de vida de adolescentes privados de liberdade devido ao cometimento de atos infracionais. Trata-se de um estudo de múltiplos casos conduzido por meio de quatro grupos focais. Participaram dos grupos 25 adolescentes, entre 15 e 19 anos, internos em unidades socioeducativas nas regiões metropolitanas do Espírito Santo e Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. Os dados foram tratados a partir da análise temática, utilizando-se procedimentos sistemáticos para a diferenciação dos casos. Verificaram-se duas formas de conceber o futuro entre os participantes: 1) a partir de projetos de vida vinculados à criminalidade, que incluíam um sentido de ação claro para o futuro; e 2) a partir de aspirações de futuro relacionadas à educação, família e trabalho, mas sem um sentido de ação por meio do qual se intentava atingir tais aspirações. Os resultados sugerem a infetividade do sistema socioeducativo em promover projetos de vida saudáveis.

Palavras-chave: projetos de vida, adolescentes em conflito com a lei, medidas socioeducativas, privação de liberdade, comportamento antisocial

Resumen: El objetivo de esta investigación es caracterizar proyectos de vida de adolescentes privados de libertad debido a la comisión de actos de infracción. Un estudio de múltiples casos se realizó con cuatro grupos focales. Participaron del estudio 25 adolescentes, entre 15 y 19 años, internos en unidades socioeducativas en las regiones metropolitanas de Espírito Santo y Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. Los datos fueron tratados a partir del análisis temático, utilizando procedimientos sistemáticos para la diferenciación de los casos. Se verificaron dos formas de los participantes de concebir el futuro: 1) a partir de proyectos de vida vinculados a la criminalidad, incluyendo un sentido de acción claro para el futuro; y 2) a partir de aspiraciones de futuro relacionadas con educación, familia y trabajo, pero sin un sentido de acción a través del cual se intentaba lograr tales aspiraciones. Los resultados sugieren que el sistema socioeducativo es infectivo en la promoción de proyectos de vida saludables.

Palabras-clave: proyectos de vida, adolescentes en conflicto con la ley, medidas socioeducativas, privación de libertad, comportamiento antisocial

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The objective of this study was to characterize the life projects of adolescents under socio-educational measures of confinement (ASEMC). The theoretical assumptions behind this study were the concepts of Marcelino, Catão, and Lima (2009) regarding life projects, defined as ‘the intention to transform reality, guided by a representation of the meaning of this transformation, in which the future perspective is guided by the actual conditions governing the relationship between the past and present’ (p. 547). This theoretical orientation encompasses socio-affective and socio-cognitive aspects, which are related to dialectical processes between the mind and the outside world. A spatiotemporal dimension emphasizes the importance of the experiences lived from childhood to the present. Life projects reflect a critical attitude towards individual experiences, with ways to become aware of the (im)possibilities of overcoming the present reality. They are aspirations for the future, accompanied by a sense of action.

Insights from the Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) have also influenced the research. Their primary contribution may be summarized as the emphasis on developmental processes and noting the influences of personal and contextual characteristics on these processes. The related theoretical concepts were not used for the data analysis, highlighting instead the theoretical references to life projects.

The elaboration of life projects has been understood by authors with different theoretical perspectives to be a task associated with a moment in which an adolescent is expected to focus attention on the future. In this sense, life projects are perceived as protective factors that prevent involvement in risky behaviour (Dellazzana-Zanon, & Freitas, 2015).

Developing life projects is, therefore, one of the objectives of socio-educational measures (SEM). These are judicial measures administered to adolescents who commit crimes in Brazil. The National System of Socio-Educational Services (SINASE, Brazil, 2006) specifies that ‘socio-educational actions must exert an influence on the life of the adolescent, contributing to identity formation, to promote the development of life projects’ (p. 52). Despite the intentions of SINASE, a systematic literature review (Coscioni, Costa, Rosa, & Koller, 2017) of 30 Brazilian surveys

conducted in socio-educational juvenile detention centres indicated that SEM has been ineffective in its goal of promoting juvenile development.

A literature review (Coscioni, Rosa, Koller, & Dell’Aglío, submitted) analysed 13 Brazilian studies that assessed the life projects of adolescents under socio-educational measures (ASEM). The primary conclusions of the review were 1) education, work and family were present in the life projects of ASEM; 2) these life projects were similar to those from studies of adolescents outside the judicial system; 3) life projects associated with criminal conduct were observed but at a lower frequency, in the ASEM reports; 4) the prevalence of socially accepted life projects can be related to a *discourse of change*, influenced by the need to omit compromising information; 5) the life projects mentioned were characterized, above all, as anxiousness regarding the future, disconnected from a sense of action that would enable their achievement; and 6) as such, the examined constructs appeared closer to the conceptualization of future aspirations than to life projects. Starting from this gap and with due regard for its importance, the objective of this study was to characterize life projects of ASEMC.

Method

Design and Context

The research was structured as a multiple case study (Stake, 2006) and focus groups with ASEMC served as individual cases. The focus groups were conducted in the metropolitan areas of Espírito Santo (ES) and Rio Grande do Sul (RS). In each of the regions, two different age groups were used: 1) 15 to 17 years old and 2) 18 and 19 years old. The participating institutions in RS were the Socio-educational Service Centre of Porto Alegre II (CASE POA II, in its Portuguese acronym) and the Socio-Educational Community (CSE, in its Portuguese acronym), in which the first and second age groups were based, respectively. In the ES, the younger group session was held at the Socio-educational Confinement Unit (UNIS, in its Portuguese acronym), and the older group session at Provisional Confinement Unit I (UNIP I, in its Portuguese acronym). Despite its name, UNIP I only received adolescents who were already in SEM.

Participants

Twenty-five ASEM C males, divided into groups of six, participated in the study. The CASE POA II group had seven members because during the data collection, there was a teenager with nowhere to be except the space in which the group met. The RS participants resided in the same residential wing and knew one another whereas the ES participants were from different wings of the institution. The number of participants who regarded themselves as ‘brown’ (mixed race) was the same for both regions, and there were more black participants in ES and white participants in RS. Only eight participants had reached high school. The names of the participants are fictitious and are based on characteristics observed during the activities.

Participants were recruited with the help of local staff. The inclusion criteria were 1) having been in SEM for at least six months (this period was considered reasonably sufficient to allow the adolescent to develop relationships with other people) and 2) receiving family visits (the focus groups included questions regarding family relationships). In addition, the history of participants’ interpersonal relations was considered, with those who had repeatedly involved themselves in conflicts being excluded. Two teenagers refused to participate – one to play ping-pong and another who did not feel comfortable being involved.

Ethical procedures

The research was accepted by a research ethics committee and is in compliance with Resolution n. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (Brazil, 2012). Its objectives, justification, procedures and ethical criteria were explained to the presidents of the socio-educational juvenile institutions, the managers, local technical teams and the adolescents. The facilitator met with the participants individually at least one day before the focus groups were conducted and provided information to ensure free and informed consent. These meetings helped establish a rapport between the adolescents and the research team. The adolescents who agreed to participate signed a consent form. Local site managers also signed the consent form for adolescents under the age of 18. The presidents of the socio-educational juvenile institutions signed an agreement authorizing the research.

Materials and data collection procedures

The focus groups were conducted in two sessions between March and April 2016 and were based on a semi-structured activity schedule. With the consent of the participants, the audio was recorded. In the first session, the participants and the research team made nametags and briefly introduced themselves. Next, the adolescents were asked to think about what they would like their lives to be like five years into the future. Working in subgroups, the adolescents created dramatizations that represented their future aspirations. The content of these dramatizations and the outlining of life projects during the SEM were discussed. In the second session, the group discussed the interpersonal relations developed during their confinement and the influence of these relationships on the development of their life projects. Because its purpose was to characterize the ASEM C life projects, the focus of this article will be on the content of the first sessions.

The research team comprised a facilitator, a co-facilitator, and two observers. One observer recorded non-verbal behaviours using a systematized observation protocol; another noted the sequence of the speech of the participants. The mediator was white and 26 years old. The co-facilitators were different in each of the regions and were between 30 and 35 years old, with a female in ES and a male in RS. The observers were also different in each state. The CASE POA II group was the only group comprising only males. In RS, all members of the research team were white whereas in ES, there were two who were ‘brown’. The facilitator recorded the data in a systematized field diary (Coscioni, 2017), which was later analysed by the other team members who conducted the fieldwork.

The adolescents were individually interviewed following activities, either immediately afterwards or the next day. Each adolescent was asked his opinion of the activities to allow for the possibility of additional input beyond what was expressed within the group. After partial analysis of the data, between December 2016 and January 2017, the research team resumed contact with the participants who remained in the socio-educational units. The purpose of this contact was to verify whether they agreed with the preliminary results.

Data analysis procedures

The focus groups and interviews were transcribed, and the data were then analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Using the *NVivo 11 software*, excerpts relevant to the research objective were coded and then grouped by semantic similarity. Subsequent themes and sub-themes were thus created *a posteriori* from an emic perspective with the thematic units themselves being named and described. A second investigator repeated the analysis and by consensus addressed any differences. Next, following systematic procedures drawn from Stake (2006), an analysis was conducted on how the entity in question presented itself in the different cases. The similarities and differences among the cases, which had been recorded in the field journals and observation protocols, were described; they

included personal and contextual aspects. The emphasis of the analysis was principally on the entity itself rather than on the case studies, which was reflected in the results. This emphasis was because individual groups were not described; instead, the entity in question was observed within the different case studies. At this stage, two investigators worked together, with the criterion for resolution again being consensus. Finally, assertions were reached based upon the data, relating the findings to the theoretical references mentioned.

Results and Discussion

The analysis produced three themes and eleven sub-themes, described in Table 1. Four assertions were drawn, described in Table 2 and in individual sections.

Table 1
Summarized description of the themes generated from the data analysis

| Theme/Subtheme | Summarized Description |
|--|---|
| Uncertain Future | Adolescents found it difficult to think about or plan for the future. They revealed that even if they make plans to <i>change their lives</i> , when they will leave the socio-educational unit, unforeseen events might occur, which will lead to their remaining in the <i>world of crime</i> . |
| <i>The High Price of Belonging to the World of Crime</i> | The adolescents became involved in conflicts and complex relationships that force them to remain in the <i>world of crime</i> . Permanence in the <i>world of crime</i> can also mean a return to the socio-educational juvenile system or entry into the penitentiary system. |
| <i>Lack of Opportunities</i> | The adolescents came from families with few financial resources. They accepted that they may have to remain permanently in the <i>world of crime</i> as it is difficult for them to enter the workforce. That because of their lack of schooling and professional training. |
| <i>Having Fun, Adrenaline, and Drugs</i> | Being in the <i>world of crime</i> was associated with a type of pleasure or adrenaline that adolescents obtained by walking armed and committing crimes. The worlds of crime also provided access to luxury, women, drugs, and <i>having fun</i> . |
| <i>Motivation, Determination, and Willpower</i> | Adolescents revealed that meeting their goals depends on determination and willpower. They added that <i>changing their lives</i> is conditioned by choices that each one must make and that nobody can influence. |
| Changing their Lives | The adolescents indicated their intentions and hopes to leave the <i>world of crime</i> . |
| <i>Education, Work, and Career</i> | The adolescents intended to work and study, mentioning advanced and technical courses, professional courses and dream jobs, finishing high school and the ENEM exam, job solicitations, opening legal businesses, and retirement. |
| <i>Family Life</i> | The adolescents want to spend more time with their families when they are left the juvenile socio-educational unit. They also expressed intentions of marrying and starting their own families. |
| <i>Quality of Life and Goods</i> | The adolescents want better living conditions for themselves and their families. They also indicated their plans to obtain a car, motorcycle, home, and furniture. |
| <i>Move to a Different City</i> | The adolescents want to move to another city so they could <i>start over</i> in a new area. They expressed that starting over in this manner could mean some melancholy and initial difficulties with adapting to the new city. |
| Remaining Permanently in the World of Crime | The adolescents intended to remain in the <i>world of crime</i> , continuing to commit criminal acts. |
| <i>Rising Upwards in Drug Dealing</i> | The adolescents perceived drug dealing as a profession and wanted to be the bosses of their own drug dens. The idea of remaining in drug dealing was also linked to plans to help the community and eliminate members of rival drug gangs. |
| <i>Theft as a Source of Funds</i> | Theft was perceived as a manner in which to obtain consumer goods, whether by supplementing monthly income or obtaining money by conducting large-scale robbery. |
| <i>Revenge</i> | The adolescents intended to avenge the deaths of their relatives. This may be considered an objective that precluded developing other, non-criminal life projects. |

Table 2
Description of the assertions made by the data analysis

| | Section Title | Summary of the Assertion |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Assertion 1 | Social inequality and being deprived of resources | Being deprived of resources combined with social inequality contributes to the entry into and permanence of adolescents in the <i>world of crime</i> . |
| Assertion 2 | Culture and career in the <i>world of crime</i> | The <i>world of crime</i> facilitates access to consumer goods and social privilege; thus, adolescents develop life projects related to continuing to commit crimes. |
| Assertion 3 | <i>The world of crime:</i> A journey of no return? | Remaining in the <i>world of crime</i> leads to negative consequences, which lead adolescents to consider other possibilities for their lives, unlinked from crime. |
| Assertion 4 | <i>Changing one's life</i> as a distant dream | The adolescents had aspirations for their lives linked to education, work, and family although they did not have a sense of action that would enable them to achieve these aspirations. |

Social Inequality and Resource Deprivation

Participants revealed that their entering and remaining in the world of crime was associated with their lack of access to resources. Historical Brazilian social inequality leads to the marginalization of socioeconomic classes with lower purchasing power. The need to access consumer goods and the necessities for basic survival causes an increase in crime among these social classes. An adolescent who participated in another study (Toledo, 2009) revealed that he used the first income earned in drug trafficking to *fill the refrigerator* in his home. A similar situation was described by one of the study participants:

My family has always suffered. My father is a worker. When I was a kid, we lacked a bunch of stuff. Because of that, I worked to help out. I earned crap for working the whole day. Those guys exploited me. From that, I got into crime, and then I always had everything I needed at home. When I was in the street life, I helped my mother with everything she needed. I would show up, give her money, but she wouldn't take it. Then I changed my approach. I would go to the store, buy a load of things and leave everything in the house (Honesto, 18 years old).

Participants declared that entering the *world of crime* was advantageous because, as opposed to the labour market, one can earn money without academic qualifications. Given the absence of professional training activities within SEM, as evidenced in a statement by one of the participants, the *world of crime* was perceived as the more plausible possibility:

Crime and work are different. Crime doesn't care about your age, your schooling, or your

attitude. In the world of work, to get a job, you have to have schooling and availability. Then, we're here for a little over two years with nothing to show for it. We are then released, without work, without schooling, just nothing. You get to the city to find work and you can't. Then, the door to crime is always open, and you return to do the same thing that got you here (Dono da Boca, 19 years old).

The difficulty of entering the labour force appears to also be connected to discrimination in the community. Participants in other studies (Aranzedo & Souza, 2007; Muller, Barboza, Oliveira, Santos, & Paludo, 2009) indicated that because they spent time in SEM, they were anxious about being able to find work. A similar situation was described by participants in this study:

A guy will go looking for a job, and they already look at you differently. Sometimes, they have an opening, but they prefer not to contract you, because of the way you speak. Because there's no way a guy can change the way he talks. It doesn't matter if you dress up, with a dress shirt, slacks, a blouse (Serenio, 18 years old).

Awareness of such factors was greater among the adolescents in UNIP I, primarily influenced by the observations of the 'Questioner' (Questionador, 18 years old). This adolescent was critical of the difficulties encountered by someone from the socio-educational juvenile detention system upon returning to the community:

You see in the newspapers that a lot of people are in competition (for jobs) and don't succeed. People who got degrees and have no way to exercise their profession because they don't have any opportunities. So, will those of us in here have these opportunities outside, which many

are searching for unsuccessfully? Doubtful, isn't it? I won't go through hard times and be broke. I won't see that we need things at home and do nothing about it. The door to crime is always open. But work, not always.

Sereno (18 years old) expressed a desire to leave the *world of crime* but thought about the financial problems that he could have. His future plans included robbery as a way to supplement his income from legitimate work: *'Only hustling is also not enough, right? A guy also has to have legitimate money'*. A teenager interviewed in another study (Silva, 2014) had a similar view, indicating the need to steal in addition to the lawful work she did in a salon.

Access to resources is therefore perceived as a protective factor in developing life projects. The opinion of Franco (19 years old), whose family was better off financially, supported this notion. His personal context appeared to have facilitated the development of a clearer sense of action for the future: *'When I leave here, I know where to turn. My mother got me a job. My stepfather is in engineering. I will take a course in industrial logistics, get my qualification, a car, get married and have a wife'*.

Culture and Profession in the World of Crime

The participants emphasized that illegal activities provided easy access to consumer goods, which gave them prestige in the community: *'Everything we wanted, we got from drug dealing: money, a motorbike, a car to go out with women'* (Dono da Boca, 19 years old). An adolescent interviewed in another study (Rosário, 2004) indicated that carrying a gun attracted women. The involvement in the *world of crime* appears to also be associated with the pleasure that adolescents felt in being armed and committing crimes:

Baderneiro (18 years old): *Adrenaline is addictive. A guy wants to do what gives him adrenaline.* / Mata Rindo (18 years old): *Yeah, that feeling even when you rob for the first time* / Baderneiro: *You want to shoot guns, to rob, to feel the adrenaline.* / Mata Rindo: *Yeah, it makes your belly tingle.*

These results are supported by another study (Jesus, 2015) that revealed that committing crimes not only stemmed from the lack of material goods but also from the *subjective absence of something immaterial*. Entering the *world of crime* provided intense emotions that legitimate work did not. This *adrenaline* generated by risky activities appears to be associated with the early experiences with the *world of crime*. This is evident in one participant's statement:

Sereno (18 years old): *When I was more of a kid and had just got into crime, I took care of the guys' guns and was always trembling. Now, they move around armed, get stopped (by the police), and end up in jail.* / Facilitator: *So, you're telling me that thing of being armed... / Sereno [interrupting the Facilitator]: It is more in the beginning. Every new thing is cool. You think things are awesome.*

Impulsiveness and the need for approval may be understood as factors that provide impetus to the development of criminal life projects. These characteristics are associated with adolescence and were observed more frequently in participants younger than 18 years old. Take, for example, the case of Zeus (16 years old), who, eight months after the data collection, was interviewed and determined to be in a situation of recidivism. Zeus confirmed that access to material goods and women motivated him to commit new crimes: *'More and more [female genitalia] mess up your mind, that and cars. A guy doesn't like to walk'*.

It was, however, the CSE participants, all over the age of 18, who stood out for their determination to remain in the *world of crime*. In the name tags they made, the presence of gang symbolism was recurrent, indicating their strong identification with their criminal peers: *'For real, for us, our "posses", the way we speak, we are a family, right?'* (Sereno, 18 years old). The prevalence of criminal life projects in the CSE may be related to the fact that this RS centre houses the *most complex cases* - an expression used to refer to recidivist adolescents and/or those who have committed more serious crimes.

The ES participants indicated that there were no large criminal gangs in the region and that their groupings in the *world of crime* were based

upon where they lived. Although some adolescents were nicknamed based on where they came from, no strong identification with these places was observed. In comparison, the RS participants even had tattoos of their gang factions. The membership in criminal factions was also reported in a Porto Alegre ASEM study (Rolim, 2014). The similarity of these findings may suggest that organized *gaúcho* (RS) crime, as opposed to *capixaba* (ES), is an additional factor that attracts adolescents to criminality. The results suggest that the *world of crime* is a culture with its own values and serves as a contextual element that influences the development of life projects.

The participants described their role in the *world of crime* based on one of two *careers*: involvement in robberies or drug dealing. Participants identify with such activities to the extent that they declare themselves to be *of the thieves* or *of the drug dealers*. Although many adolescents are involved in both activities, we observed a discourse of not agreeing with or not conducting one of them: *'I am against stealing. I never stole. I never tried to rob someone'* (Honesto, 18 years old). *'A guy like me, I am not a dealer, I'm a 157 [article of the penal code which describes robbery]'* (Sereno, 18 years old).

Participants said stealing occurred when one was part of a small group that stole together and then divided the profits. Sereno (18 years old) was a member of one of these groups, whose members all had the same tattoo. Such practices are associated with high profits, and the stolen goods are often sold to the *bosses* of *drug houses* (places in which illegal drugs are sold). There are thus connections between *theft* and *drug dealing* groups. In addition, it is common for *drug dealing gangs* to organize robberies by their members to obtain resources to purchase weapons, vehicles, and other goods.

Participants compared involvement in drug dealing to being part of a company, with hierarchical positions among its members. The adolescents began by dealing drugs on the streets, later played logistical and administrative roles, and eventually became the *bosses* of the place: *'I started as a dealer, and in time, I rose through the ranks. Now I am eighteen years old, but at seven-*

teen I had reached a level that guys at forty or fifty hadn't' (Sereno, 18 years old). *'It's like a worker (...) He starts working with machines. In a little time, he is part of the management of the company. He now doesn't do what he used to do'* (Baderneiro, 18 years old). The role of *boss* was considered to be of such prestige that becoming a boss was among the life projects of the participants:

A guy is not only going to stay in this little world of picking up [drug] packages and dividing them up. The objective is to also be a boss. Just as he wanted to be a boss, so can any of us. Just ordering people, "Go there, kill that guy", "Go there, let's figure out how what your share is, and what mine is" (Forasteiro, 17 years old).

The path to becoming a boss was described as intense work, depending on financial investment, connecting with the correct people, and personal characteristics such as intelligence, humility, and personality. The Porto Alegre study mentioned above (Rolim, 2014) observed that from a young age, its participants rose in the drug business. This rise was attributed to the recognition by the *bosses* of the *drug dens* of a job well done.

The results indicated that adolescents expressed a sense of action as a manner in which to achieve their goals in the *world of crime*. They critically reflected on events in their past and present, aware of the (im)possibilities of changes in the future. These participants thus have life projects associated with remaining in the *world of crime*. These life projects involve not only the development of a criminal career but also a lifestyle determined by a *culture of crime*, often referred to as the *world of crime*.

The World of Crime: A Journey of No Return?

The participants listed unwanted outcomes if they continued to commit crimes: *'Or you go down hard here, you are stuck in a wheelchair, or you die. In this life of crime, everything is easy come, easy go, right?'* (Lutador, 16 years old). Similar results were obtained in other studies (Aranzedo & Souza, 2007; Gomes, 2014) in which the adolescents indicated that being part of the *world of crime* was related to death in sub-

sequent conflicts and new incarcerations. Participants in another study (Gomes & Conceição, 2014) concluded that life in the *world of crime* was not worth it, noting that the economic and social rewards were ephemeral.

The period of incarceration was mentioned as a factor that relativized the advantages of the crimes committed: *'You think about the crime, but you also think about jail time'* (Usuário, 17 years old). The suffering of family members was also described as a motivation to leave the *world of crime*:

That place, full of mice, full of disease. That's not a place for the kid, is it? It's no place for anyone, but much less so for the child. The guy deserves to be there, but the kid does not. He is an angel, right? (Honesto, 18 years old)

For some adolescents, the proximity of a new incarceration was perceived with more normality: *'Fear?! Jail was made to deal with, sir'* (Zeus, 16 years old). This may be associated with both the impulsiveness and difficulty of predicting consequences as well as knowing that for participants over the age of 18, new crimes would mean being held in the penitentiary system. Zeus (16 years old) presents a perspective of recidivism in the juvenile socio-educational system:

Facilitator: *And the fact that you may return to jail? Does this make you reconsider whether you want to continue committing crimes?* / Zeus (16 years old): *Oh, I can't even tell you; it depends on the person.* / Facilitator: *But in your case?* (long pause; the adolescent appears thoughtful). / Zeus: *In my case, now I mind a little because I had not spent much time in the street life, but if I had spent more time in that life, say six months, it would have made me reconsider a lot.*

Participants also reported being involved in conflicts that put them at risk of imminent death: *'Sir, we can talk seven years from now – we are seven [referring to the number of participants] – I think there will be three of us alive'* (Pensador, 16 years old). This assertion is a possibility when considering the high mortality rates of graduates of the juvenile socio-educational system of the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Silva, 2016). The high mortality among ASEM often relates to the

drug dealing wars, characterized by conflicts between rival *drug dens*. Participants who were only involved in robbery indicated that it was easier to leave the *world of crime*. This is because they stated that there were no people in the community who would try to kill them:

Drug dealing messes you up because when a guy enters it, it is difficult to leave. Just because you enter into drug dealing, you have a lot of people against you. That's why I'm more down with 157 [theft], which is calmer. If you have someone against you, it is only the police. You have more of a chance of getting out of this life than that of a drug dealer (Serenio, 18 years old).

The *drug dealer wars* appear to have involved the development of the life projects of the adolescents. The participants indicated the necessity of being armed in case they ran into *enemies*. They revealed their intention of killing members of rival gangs. Furthermore, dying in combat was understood to be an honour: *'Baderneiro (18 years old): I am not going to go out like that, falling down on the street.'* / Mata Rindo (18 years old): *'I want to die fighting.'* / Baderneiro: *'If it's time for me to die, they will get me, but I will take two or three of them with me'*.

Similar results were observed in another study (Gomes & Conceição, 2014), which highlighted how the *drug wars* changed the conception of death. Killing enemies 'is not only seen as an act of defending one's own life but is glorious and makes the individual a hero within the group' (p. 56). Regarding those who die in combat, 'they are awarded the distinction of having honour, courage and valour' (p. 56). The previously mentioned study conducted in Porto Alegre (Rolim, 2014) emphasized its participants' immersion in the drug wars as an everyday occurrence. Based on the murder of people previously considered friends, the results revealed the trivialization of death.

The drug wars were also related to the participants' stated desires for revenge. The case of the adolescent Zé Pequeno (18 years old), an orphan, was particularly prominent. The adolescent's desire for revenge manifested itself as a life project that prevented him from thinking about

other possibilities for the future: *'I only want revenge, right? They killed my dad and mom. And they are still alive. I'll only leave crime after I am able to get my revenge'*. A study conducted in RS (Silveira, Machado, Zappe, & Dias, 2015) also described ASEM life projects connected to avenging loved ones.

Among the RS participants, leaving the city was mentioned as a way to achieve a *new start*. They mentioned the difficulties that this would involve because it would mean living away from loved ones. However, an abrupt change was viewed as the only way to leave the *world of crime*. The adolescents revealed that in addition to conflicts with rival gangs, the city of Porto Alegre itself was too dangerous: *'A guy knows that leaving crime can only happen away from here; there's no way to stay in Porto Alegre'* (Baderneiro, 18 years old).

The results suggest that some of the adolescents understood that remaining in the *world of crime* would bring serious consequences. Some developed aspirations for a future disconnected from crime. Such aspirations, however, were not accompanied by any sense of action, except the idea of moving to another city. Based on the same phenomenon, some adolescents strengthened their commitment to life projects linked to crime. They described belonging to the *world of crime* as a journey of no return, assuming that remaining members of their gangs would protect them from their *enemies*. This choice appeared to be associated with the degree of involvement in crime and was more frequent among the RS participants.

An ethnographic study conducted with adolescents under probation in Porto Alegre (Koerich, 2016) reached similar results. The researcher determined that her participants could be classified into two groups. The first group comprised adolescents with sporadic involvement in the *world of crime*. These adolescents saw the possibilities for a different future, earning funds from legitimate work similar to the funds they earned from crime. The second group included adolescents with greater involvement in the *world of crime* who did not indicate having future expectations of a life unrelated to crime.

Changing One's Life as a Distant Dream

Although the adolescents indicated that they had future aspirations related to education, work, and family, they lacked a sense of action to realize such aspirations. When asked, 'How would you like your future to be?' the recurring answers involved working lawfully, having access to goods such as a home and a car, spending more time with their families, and even starting their own families. Some participants even mentioned employment solicitations and retirement. Such aspirations appeared to be distant goals, scarcely attainable *dreams*:

In the future, if we follow the plan, we will have worked, saved money, and reached a good standard of living. We could be having fun and relaxing in a peaceful place to live with our family. I am planning this, a few years from now to chill out. Relax and enjoy life. Maybe it won't work out, right? In this sense, we know that things aren't easy (Questionador, 18 years old)

Regarding education, opinions were divided between merely finishing high school and proceeding further, obtaining a technical or college degree. Some adolescents showed interest in particular careers linked to their *dreams*. Among these were becoming a professional fighter or soccer player. The other careers of interest generally involved professions familiar from their daily lives, such as being a police officer, a socio-educational worker or a lawyer. These choices may indicate that the adolescents were unaware of different career possibilities, restricting their choices to those closest to their reality. The choices of professions such as policeman and socio-educational worker appear to be related to an *addiction to adrenaline*: *'I like a little adrenaline. Maybe I live a very different life, but I think that opportunities are for all. Maybe I can try and get into the police force or something similar'* (Observador, 19 years old). Only one adolescent connected this choice of profession to the idea of serving the public good but also viewed it as an opportunity to legally carry a gun: *'My interest in being a socio-educational worker is to help people leave the life that I once led. And, also*

to be able to carry a gun legally, so I wouldn't walk around armed, get caught by the police and return to jail' (Lutador, 16 years old).

Their future aspirations also placed great importance on the family, which was often viewed as motivation to leave the *world of crime*: 'When I find the right person, when I have my child, I think the first thing I'm going to do is get away from crime' (Honesto, 18 years old). Future aspirations regarding education, work and family were recurrent in other Brazilian studies on ASEM life projects (Coscioni et al., submitted). These future aspirations appeared to have been influenced by personal aspects, particularly intelligence:

I took the ENEM (National High School Exam, in its Portuguese acronym), and barely didn't pass. I think that the only good thing I have is intelligence. If I had started out differently, with thinking like I do today, with my intelligence, I could have been in a different place, more advanced (Honesto, 18 years old).

Although the participants referred to their future aspirations in their statements, the results suggest the absence of life projects. The adolescents' responses lacked any sense of action and indicated their own disbelief that such aspirations would be fulfilled. The ES participants, particularly those in UNIP I, indicated, although only marginally, a greater sense of action than the RS adolescents. This greater sense of action was reflected by their being able to name possible technical courses that they could take. This result appeared to be associated with their attending a set of lectures in the recent past that addressed the labour market in the state. Even so, in general, what characterized the discourse of the participants was numerous uncertainties: 'A guy dreams of a family, something peaceful, but when he returns to the streets, no way' (Pensador, 16 years old).

A research conducted in Ceará (Gomes, 2014) obtained similar results. Also using collective data collection techniques, that study investigated the ASEM's *future meaning*. That study observed that the participants had *dreams* of

starting a family, education, and entering the job market. However, the dreams were not associated with any sense of action that would have enabled those dreams to be realized. The researcher also determined that the participants had short- and medium-term achievable plans of action. These plans were termed *goals* and involved advancing in drug dealing and acts of robbery. These goals were not regarded by the researcher as a *life project*. This term was used to refer to actions which would represent breaking with their criminal past and realizing their *dreams*. This possibility of *change* was closely connected to the *willpower* of the adolescents and appeared to be quite distant. When present, change was associated with a drastic act, such as moving to another city.

Participants in this study also emphasized that *willpower* was an important characteristic to have to achieve their goals. Faced with the difficulties of achieving their goals, they had two positions: 1) a pessimistic position that *changing their lives* would be impossible: 'I want to leave this life (of crime), but I don't know if I have the willpower to go backwards. To do so, you must have willpower' (Inquieto, 19 years old); and 2) an optimistic position that *changing their lives* was possible: 'I've put it in my head, I am determined. If you want something, if you want it, you must look for it, go after what you want. You must go after it. It is difficult, but you work and God helps' (Franco, 19 years old).

Final Considerations

In general, the participants' conceptions of the future may be classified into two broad groups. Some of the adolescents described a set of future aspirations related to education, family, and work but did not exhibit any sense of action necessary to achieve such aspirations. The other group exhibited criminal life projects, and these plans included a clear sense of action.

The life projects and aspirations of the participants were linked to contextual issues. Being deprived of resources appears to favour entrance into the *world of crime*, which provides access to consumer goods, prestige, and a sense

of belonging to a larger group. Remaining in the *world of crime* is also associated with a risk of incarceration and imminent death, leading some adolescents to reconsider their future. Given the difficulties of entering the labour market, the possibility of *changing their lives* was perceived as a distant dream. Life projects connected to the *world of crime* were more frequent among the RS adolescents. This difference appears to be related to the influence of organized crime in Porto Alegre on the participants' development of life projects.

It was noted that personal characteristics influenced the development of life projects. Schooling, professional training, being proactive, intelligence and determination were characteristics that favoured life projects unlinked to the *world of crime*. Similarly, impulsivity, the need for peer approval, and difficulty in anticipating consequences appeared to favour the development of criminal life projects.

These results differ from the majority of the Brazilian studies that have considered life projects of ASEM. The majority of previous studies concluded that the participants involved developed *life projects* related to education, work, and family. However, these studies did not mention a sense of action by which the participants would implement their plans (Coscioni et al., submitted). Stating intentions and future desires does not constitute the development of a life project but merely reflects aspirations for the future. Only if aspirations are accompanied by a sense of action can these future aspirations be considered a life project (Marcelino et al., 2009). Thus, although the findings of the present study are similar to previous findings, it arrives at different conclusions: the participants have future aspirations related to education, work, and family but lack a life project to achieve these aspirations.

By examining the information regarding criminal life projects, this study provides theoretical contributions. The review of the literature (Coscioni et al., submitted) mentioned above indicated that limited studies have observed life projects linked to the *world of crime*. The studies that reported these findings had methodological

characteristics that facilitated a greater proximity between the research context and everyday reality. The methodological characteristics of the current research may also be related to being able to access this type of information: 1) initial encounters with the adolescents may have promoted the development of a higher quality *rapport* (Coscioni, Dias, Rosa & Koller, 2017), and 2) the focus groups may have facilitated the establishment of a context similar to daily life (Weller, 2006).

The study also makes theoretical contributions by understanding the intention to remain in the *world of crime* to be a life project. Previous research with similar results did not conceive such intentions to be life projects. The findings were viewed as evidence of the absence of future expectations (Coscioni et al., submitted). Disregarding intended permanence in the *world of crime* as a life project is a consequence of adopting an ethnocentric stance. Future aspirations related to criminality, accompanied by a sense of action to achieve these aspirations, should also be considered a life project, although it is the opposite of what is expected by SINASE (Brazil, 2006).

Interventions targeted at youth under ASEM should consider the youths' aspirations for the future. Those adolescents with criminal life projects should receive interventions that facilitate the visualization of new life possibilities and discourage their aspirations to permanently remain in the *world of crime*. For adolescents with vague future aspirations regarding education, work, and family, activities should be developed that favour the development of a sense of action to achieve these aspirations. These activities should enable adolescents to make informed choices but also provide opportunities for them to implement these choices. Similarly, it is important to reconsider jailing adolescents because it creates a true paradox. How can the state promote life projects free from crime among adolescents who have committed crimes and are together with others in the same situation? As long as the state relinquishes its role of guaranteeing rights, the *world of crime* will guarantee them, even if illicitly.

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