Impeaching Reality: An action-research study exploring the development of a democratic pedagogy for community-based learning in a context of poverty in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines how a community-based learning program within the context of poverty can educate adult learners about their social realities and motivate them to take organized action for social change. The main issue identified in this study was the participants' social precariousness, which affected their involvement in community affairs, including the initiative conducted for this thesis. Additionally, their lack of social support and belief in overcoming the inertia of their circumstances further restricted their engagement. With a Neighborhood Council that typically operated during individual or collective emergencies and minimal hope for change in their lives and environments, participants often adopted a general attitude of resignation and civic passivity (Bourdieu, 1981). This thesis contends that this reality can be challenged and proposes a strategy to encourage participants toward social action.

Using a sociological lens, this action research study took place in El Progreso, a small, impoverished neighborhood in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Over the course of five weekly workshops, the adult education program encouraged participants to inquire into and reflect on their realities, learn effective methods to assess community needs, discuss and understand their rights regarding public institutions, and plan organized actions based on principles of equity for social justice and compassionate leadership. At the conclusion of this research experience, several findings emerged: (1) It confirmed that individuals living in

historical poverty and social marginalization often channel their vulnerabilities into civic engagement; (2) when participants were encouraged to transform their experiences into an inquiry process that provides names, concepts, numbers, and voices to their realities, their awareness and motivation towards the potential for social action increased; (3) through organized discussions about community issues, participants developed the ability to envision new possibilities and innovative methods for achieving their goals; (4) when the program facilitated dialogue among state agencies, participants, and the PI's sociological perspective on the community's status, the official narrative was enriched, leading to a deeper understanding of people's perspectives and the validation of social science findings; (5) by positioning participants as the program's protagonists, grounded in their legitimacy as local residents and their experiential knowledge tailored for the occasion through various adult education strategies, their individual and collective dignity was recognized and promoted.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that (1) social learning, which integrates adult education strategies with sociological knowledge and techniques, can enhance social inquiry both as a method and as a goal of empowering adult learners' awareness and reconstructing shared beliefs; (2) this sociologically informed pragmatism may assist populations from impoverished backgrounds in developing and enhancing community social organization and compassionate leadership, which strengthen local policy perspectives to advance comprehensive local democracy practices and promote social change.

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Dedication

To my mother, Margot, and in memory of my beloved father, Raúl Pérez Peña, Bacho.

To my friend, Marcos Jorge Elías, in memoriam. To the people of El Progreso.

As a Preface

[…] On convint donc

De ne plus employer l'art de la poèsie

Que pour la bagatelle et pour la fantasie,

Sauf à batir dans l'ombre une oeuvre de combat.

Paul Verlaine (1869)[1].

[1] In Murphy (2010, p.588)

Chapter 1: Problem and object of study

The limited world of our observation and reflection
becomes the Universe only through imaginative extension.
John Dewey[2]

Introduction

In a 1945 article, Eduard Lindeman asked in an "imperative mood": Why don't American sociologists do something about adult education? There, the late professor of social work at Columbia University urged sociologists to be interested in the field of adult education since it brings: "a wide assortment of opportunities for research, programs for social action in which fact and value are brought into operating relationship, and for marking a contribution to democratic progress" (Lindeman, 1945, p. 6).

This solicitation to sociologists still holds today most of its relevance: being psychology and, to some extent, social philosophy, primarily the base of most of the approaches to adult-learning research, its epistemologies and methods have been historically less concerned with what empirical sociology can say and do about it. Being trained as a political scientist and sociologist and later as an adult educator, my professional work has been at the intersection of these three academic disciplines, finding many complementary points and converging interests, perspectives, and mutual enrichment.

[2] In A common faith (1934)

This thesis initially explores how to articulate my three university degrees to contribute to improving a concrete reality of the common good: the functioning of a Neighborhood Council in an impoverished community in the Dominican Republic, which is hindered by challenging social conditions. To address this issue, none of the three academic perspectives mentioned above can operate effectively in isolation. Political science concerning the local life of a community must incorporate an understanding of the sociology of its inhabitants and the impact of poverty within that sociology.

While a sociology of poverty can grasp the reality of deprivation (and the circumstances of those in need), it must also learn how to foster social change from an educational perspective. For any adult education program, instructor, or researcher to achieve its objectives effectively, they must first comprehend the social and cultural context of the place and the population they will work with. Thus, it presented a challenge and, at the same time, the only viable approach to integrate the three areas of knowledge into a cohesive action research effort.

I initially questioned how an adult education program might enhance local leadership in poverty-stricken contexts, bolster its commitment to social organizations, and improve the Neighborhood Council along with its democratic practices.

A second question arose: How can adult education programs leverage insights from political science and sociology to develop a learning process for community leadership that provides informed training for practicing local democracy?

The reality of the El Progreso sector and its Neighborhood Council enabled me to implement a research project that would clearly articulate three key areas of interest: adult

education, sociology, and political science within the scope of experimental adult education. Furthermore, its location in a poverty-stricken Dominican neighborhood posed a challenge to the European and American cultural contexts of my training and much of the existing literature on the subject. While it is true that Paulo Freire's work closely aligns with the political, sociological, and cultural themes I proposed, it is also essential to recognize that the primary work of this renowned Brazilian educator, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," was written over 50 years ago during a political, social, and cultural era that differs significantly from today. It does not reflect the contributions that scholarship has made since then across the three disciplines mentioned. This led me to the topic of my thesis.

Background and context of the research problem

In the Dominican Republic, communities living in poverty often endure various calamities, not just material ones. They also confront intellectual poverty and social helplessness, which undermine their already complex reality and their capacity for self-organization and agency concerning public institutions (Cela, 2020). This thesis project examines how social education, through a sociologically informed community-based learning program, can enhance the collective democratic capacities of a Neighborhood Council and its members despite the challenges and marginalization typically faced by neighborhoods like El Progreso.

The community of El Progreso, commonly referred to as El Semillero, is situated in an urban area in the heart of Santo Domingo, surrounded by upper-middle-class neighborhoods that sharply contrast with the lower socio-economic status of many residents. The neighborhood

consists of houses and alleys, effectively serving as a refuge for housing or urban development within which it is confined. This area is often referred to in the Dominican Republic as a "pocket" of poverty. According to the latest census by SIUBEN[3], over 800 families reside there. Its members, while neither homeless nor part of the most vulnerable segments of Dominican society, fall within the poverty strata based on existing data.

The residents of this community have a Neighborhood Council dedicated to enhancing their social conditions. However, according to some current and former members consulted[4], this Council faces several limitations that impede its ability to inspire and organize the community, as well as improve the structure of its public agency. A social worker who has been visiting the community for nearly a decade told me, "Despite being in operation for over twenty years, the Neighborhood Council's ability to effect change is limited due to a lack of financial resources and an understanding of how to garner the support of all residents and unite them around addressing the problems they face collectively. This understanding is something they need to cultivate and develop themselves."

A centralized national political system marked by often non-democratic practices has cultivated a prevailing authoritarian political culture that neither educates nor accommodates local forms of social organization and community action. Dominicans, especially those living in poverty, including the residents of El Progreso, typically adopt a resigned attitude towards their

[3] Information collected in a recent count made by the SIUBEN, the state agency in charge of raising and organizing the "socio-economic and demographic database used by institutions and social organizations to plan and invest resources." https://datos.gob.do/organization/about/sistema-unico-de-beneficiarios-siuben retrieved on 02/15/2022 at 9:33 a.m.

[4] During the first informal conversations held with the most active members of the Neighborhood Council, the "defenselessness" before the public powers is one of the most dissuasive elements that affect the community and its organization.

social circumstances, a behavior frequently observed in populations facing social, political, and economic marginalization (Lazarfeld, 1933; Bourdieu, 1981; Patterson, 1982). Scholars in adult education, such as Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (2003), have examined this issue from an adult education perspective. Building on the contributions of these authors and the enduring tradition of adult education aimed at promoting social justice, the central theme of this thesis focuses on how to establish a learning community that, informed by adult education principles and sociological insights, can democratically enhance the reflexivity and social action capabilities of a Neighborhood Council within a poverty context.

Problem statement

How can one access an impoverished neighborhood in Santo Domingo and propose a project that sparks interest in public affairs and community organization among populations who have little time or energy for anything beyond survival and supporting their families in tough living conditions? How does one engage and persuade people to willingly participate in a Neighborhood Council experience focused on promoting the common good and general interest when the prevailing social and political practices in their society prioritize individual and private interests?

The questions posed the most significant challenge this project encountered, and their answers became the central issue of the thesis: How could the program here re-enchant historically disenchanted populations to believe in and participate in community projects?

On paper, the theory may sound intriguing as long as it addresses specific realities at its core. Therefore, effective pedagogical techniques are essential for achieving this; the best adult education strategies often emerge from the field. It is not merely about arriving at a location and executing a predetermined plan. First, it is vital to understand the challenges one might face in the

field and, from there, develop or revise an action plan that, within limited resources, addresses as many issues and goals as possible for the populations involved. This thesis focuses on those with significant social liabilities that impact citizenship and political culture. Thus, before proposing an educational experiment based on social learning that promotes reflection and social action, this thesis considers the motivation of program participants. In that re-enchantment lies the heart of the problem to be solved: re-motivating individuals within the community project of social organization and local democracy. This is why adult education, in this context, requires a fundamental sociological understanding of its population. Additionally, pragmatism must incorporate sociology to become part of the collaborative inquiry of participants about themselves.

Due to a lifetime of marginalization or denial of participation, the vigor of participants' initial interest remained the researcher's primary concern throughout the experience. The core issue is fundamentally sociological: it examines how to challenge the social logic underlying a phenomenon as critical as defection from democracy, even at the local level. In his renowned essay "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" (1970), Albert Hirschman categorizes three types of consumer responses to declining organizations: the first, defects from the crisis, the second, protests against it, and the third, remaining loyal to it. This strategy takes a different approach: it aims to inspire those who feel rejected and have distanced themselves from the public to return through their voices. A voice restored: informed, aware, sensitive, compassionate, and trained in democratic leadership to inspire others. By cultivating imagination and hope, American pragmatism—from John Dewey to Stanley Cavell—combined with the African American experience, from Martin Luther King (Shelby & Terry, 2018) to Ella Baker (2024), helped foster an adult education response to the challenges faced in El Progreso.

Research purpose and questions

This thesis studies social learning strategies to enhance a neighborhood council's knowledge to motivate, reflect, and act within the context of poverty. This may strengthen socially organized action by advancing political awareness, neighborhood empathy, and democratic local leadership. A series of action research workshops were designed to promote collective dialogue and self-reflection among residents regarding the reality of their neighborhood in El Progreso, aiming to explore a social pathway through which the community can gain comprehensive sociological knowledge and a democratic approach to organized action.

This adult education program revisited Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (1970), which draws from the critical sociology tradition and aligns with Dewey's practical philosophy of democracy (1929).

For such purposes, the program tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the learning outcomes of an experimental adult education program aimed at fostering awareness and empowerment within an impoverished Dominican community?

2. How did the program's key components (sociological approach, action research, democratic practices, adult education methods, and ideals) support the group's learning?

Research Design Overview

This thesis project was conducted from an action research methodology, in which it is sought as a "discipline process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking action. The primary reason for engaging in action is to assist the actor in improving or refining his or her action" (Sagor & William, 2016, p1).

This action research was conducted in the local community of El Progreso. The Neighborhood Council served as the focal point of the project, which took place in the local church building. SIUBEN, the state agency responsible for assessing poverty levels in communities across the Dominican Republic, also took part. The agency conducted a census for this occasion and presented the resulting data.

The action research went through the following steps:

1. **I presented the project, its** purpose, content, and formats at the first informal meeting with the Neighborhood Council members.
2. **A second meeting with the Neighborhood Council was held to present SIUBEN's** plans for conducting a socioeconomic and demographic census in the area. I coordinated the day and the local group that the Neighborhood Council would support in assisting SIUBEN's data collection.
3. **The SIUBEN census was conducted** with the participation of Neighborhood Council members and the PI.
4. Then, **a general meeting for orientation and recruitment was held** for both members and non-members. During this meeting, we discussed the project's objectives, its significance for democratic action (including a section on local democracy and how a neighborhood council can uphold this principle), its methodology, and the upcoming work actions and scheduling.

5. **A first round of in-depth pre-assessment interviews** was conducted to establish the participants' socioeconomic profiles, their life experiences in the neighborhood and community affairs, and their relationships with the Neighborhood Council.
6. **This initial round of information gathering was conducted and analyzed**. From this, a prosopography of the participants' and community's sociological profiles was created, and the educational strategies originally planned were reviewed.

The initial actions formed the bulk of Chapter 4 of this thesis: first, the investigation of the sector and the participants, followed by the critical recruitment process. Afterward, the participants and I, as the Principal Investigator, commenced a series of workshops.

4. **Workshop 1: Reconstructing the Hope and Purposes of Social Organization.** It was the first actual workshop, held at a second general meeting. It discussed what a community is, specifically in the context of poverty, and how it is organized according to democratic principles. The goal was to establish a general framework of understanding that provides a taste for shared knowledge extracted from the participants' experiences and accumulated knowledge.
5. **Workshop 2: Reconstructing Community Knowledge.** The second workshop aimed to explore the census findings conducted by SIUBEN and validate them by cross-referencing this data with the project participants' experiential knowledge. A tripartite conversation was established, incorporating statistics, participants' experiential insights, and the

sociological expertise that I contributed, in order to achieve a result that is as close as possible, both quantitatively and conceptually, to the actual state of the community.

6. **Workshop 3: Reconstructing the responses to community problems.**

   Based on the outcomes of prior discussions, we moved forward with a third workshop organized in groups focused on various social issues. The goal was to strengthen the Neighborhood Board's practical response to community challenges and reach internal agreements on feasible solutions for a specific social problem and motivation for social engagement action.

7. **Workshop 4: Reconstructing imagination as a social action for change.**

   After identifying the neighborhood council's problems and reactions, the fourth workshop focused on organizing actions related to two community issues through inspired imagination. This workshop addressed how the Neighborhood Board would be structured with external instances or institutions. The aim was to reconstruct the organization and work together to take social action as a Neighborhood Council.

8. **Workshop 5: Reconstructing planning and leadership. A mission for the future.** The PI convened a fifth workshop with the participants to foster a constructivist dialogue between them and public agencies regarding potential collaboration. The second part focused on delivering a concluding message. This could stimulate a reflective process while reiterating the central ideas that the experience aimed to highlight, particularly the functioning of local democracy through pedagogical leadership that is sensitive to and understanding of others and their concerns circumstances.

9. **Nine participants were interviewed in depth after their** program experience to evaluate their development, perceptions, and potential learning outcomes.
10. **A visit by the PI to El Progreso, months after,** as a reflective epilogue.

When applied, each exercise was documented in a participant observation diary and transcript, followed by an analysis of the collected data. Each stage informed the next round of work. As part of the action research dynamic, each of these stages includes "collecting evaluative data and analyzing it, reviewing the data and searching for contradictions, addressing contradictions by introducing change, monitoring change, analyzing evaluative data regarding the change, reviewing the change, and deciding what to do next" (Robson, 2002, p. 215). These analyses were backed by empirical evidence. They highlighted the participants' voices and sustained an ongoing dialogue with the literature and concepts in the field of adult education, as well as the situations they ultimately faced.

Components

To achieve this purpose, and in coordination with the Neighborhood Council, an average of 15 people participated in each proposed activity, with a maximum of 20 and a minimum of 12 participants in the different workshops. All participants were community members, regardless of their affiliation with the Neighborhood Council, who voluntarily chose to engage in the project. The project will consist of four action-research workshops focused on the social issues of the territory. On average, the workshops lasted one and a half hours each and took place approximately every eight days over the course of two months.

Rationale

Across the globe, representative democracies have been favoring visible institutions (Congress, Senate, Executive Branch, Armed Forces, elections, mayors, etc.) at the expense of invisible institutions (authority, trust, and legitimacy). These invisible institutions are vital to any society because they nurture and regulate the relationships among its members (Rosanvallon, 2024). Authoritarianism, the concentration of power and wealth, and rising inequality have been eroding the foundations of societal life, fostering distrust among neighbors, coworkers, and classmates (Allen, 2005; Putnam and Feldstein, 2009). The power held today by the corporate class (Wolin, 2010) typically does not yield power to ordinary people. Established local power often engages in partisan politics, replicating in neighborhoods the same clientelist logic where individuals serve the system instead of taking a leading role.

This thesis project aims to serve as a window into the possibility of reinventing local democracy, free from the corporatist logic that is alien to a community, from a pragmatic perspective of neighborhoods that can rebuild faith in the community as a space not only for coexistence but also for the production of hope. It seeks to move beyond mere resignation, or in the best cases, resistance to survival, toward an opportunity for transcendence and constant improvement—that is, for community moral perfectionism. It aims to put into practice a specific case for reconstructing the ability to do things beyond the probable, as discussed by Hirschman (1971), and transform it into a community educational exercise of democratic perfectionism (Havercroft, 2023) in the tradition of Emerson and Dewey (Saito, 2005) and Cavell (Norris, 2005).

Significance

Paulo Freire's work integrated education with political activism, alerting us to a series of tasks necessary to forge a critical pedagogy that raises our awareness of domination and the intellectual mechanisms needed to liberate ourselves from it. This thesis seeks to achieve two specific objectives. First, it aims to sensitize the realm of militant education aimed at social change regarding the importance of understanding the social subject and its historical context. This understanding is crucial for conceiving, designing, and implementing a praxis of education for social change, thereby heeding Edward Lindeman's call to link adult education with sociology (Brookfield, 1987) in a joint effort of emancipatory social work.

Secondly, when Freire developed his pedagogy of the oppressed, the concept of domination was still not widely recognized. Information channels were limited. Today, social networks have provided access to a multitude of information sources that have disrupted the official channels of content production and dissemination, which individuals can access through their smartphones. Nowadays, people are much more cognizant of inequalities than in the past; they feel these inequalities deeply and often express them as resentment stemming from the frustration of knowing something and being unable to effect meaningful change. The adult education program we have designed here aims to transform this resentment into collective action led by community leaders for the benefit of less fortunate community members.

If, for Freire, education is a practice of freedom (Darder, 2018), I aim to demonstrate in this thesis how social organization operates as an educational practice. This implies that human

learning is grounded in social interactions and can only occur democratically in communion with others.

Assumptions of the Study

As a sociologist, political scientist, and adult educator, the researcher assumes the following criteria:

1. Most adults can learn and incorporate new things into their lives, which could eventually lead to change. People living under conditions of poverty face a series of serious difficulties that usually force them into a state of survival, making it very hard to allocate time and resources to reflect on their lives and pursue potential changes.
2. Those in poverty often exist within social structures that dictate the essentials of their lives, often beyond their control or capacities, leaving little room for individual maneuvering to alter their circumstances. Only a minority are able to escape these conditions; the majority remain trapped in arbitrary processes of social reproduction.
3. However, people in poverty can become aware of their circumstances and change their outlook on life if they encounter processes or situations that encourage reflection and inspire new hopes and practices beyond their daily routines (e.g., a sports club, a church, a cultural association, a personal incident, an educational program, etc.).

4. The opportunity to gain self-knowledge and improve one's life is significantly enhanced when individuals in poverty come together to consider the possibility of community improvements. Although merely reflecting on reality does not change it, it can shift one's attitude toward it, primarily when engaged through organized social action. Through solidarity, a renewed hope for the future can emerge.
5. The social organization of a community, particularly in impoverished contexts, is often challenging. However, the potential for organization is always a possibility. For this to happen, strategies such as adult education programs may be necessary to reconstruct community members' faith in collaborative efforts. Adult education serves as a mechanism that allows individuals and communities to reflect on their life experiences and derive lessons that may transform their personal and social circumstances realities.
6. As a figure that provokes self-reflection, pragmatism can turn our lives into a meaningful pedagogical exercise that can help us gain more control over our present and future history. It can also work for community life, which necessarily impacts the lives of one's environment and one's own.
7. Community organizations can reconstruct people's faith in democracy, politics as the possibility for social change, and ethics for the common good.
8. Sociology can significantly enrich adult education as a research method that generates knowledge and compassion for our environment and others. This can also be applied to neighborhood democracy and community leadership.

9. An educational program that promotes and encourages neighborhood politics privileging the people's problems rather than the traditional political struggle for power, usually far from the people's interests, may contribute significantly to rebuilding neighbors' faith in democracy at the local level and social trust among each other.
10. Democracy is about communal decisions through people's involvement in social processes. It requires universal participation in wealth generation and community building, with full respect for everyone's dignity. Engaging in democracy at the local level may help considerably the well-being of the member of a community.
11. Confronting this overwhelming reality is the first step toward overcoming resignation and social inertia, transforming necrophilic politics into biophilic politics (Freire, 1970), and rebuilding a shared faith in a better future days.

Definition of terms

Since this thesis project on adult education involving participants from impoverished contexts is part of a sociological vision of pedagogical action, a range of sociological concepts will be integrated into educational leadership and teaching methods. This glossary of key terms is presented in the same order as the initial conception of the ethnographic fieldwork for working with them. It begins with concepts that help us understand the culture of the people and the context of El Progreso, followed by a series of notions, as this thesis aims to identify workable domains from an educational perspective. Furthermore, it concludes with several notions envisioned as potential opportunities to enhance participants' outcomes. The research conducted facilitated the incorporation of additional operational concepts.

Cultural capital: the type and degree of knowledge a person possesses regarding aesthetic forms, intellectual references, expression capabilities, and more. Cultural capital is typically assessed by the standards or norms of a society's dominant (legitimate) culture.

Habitus: a collection of dispositions, attitudes, and skills that, shaped by their social history, characterize a specific social agent within a particular social space.

Practical sense: the ways in which a social agent feels, thinks, and acts, influenced by the habitus and the field of interaction.

Field: the social space where interactions between social agents occur, functioning autonomously due to its own rules and dynamics of coexistence and social competence.

Field theory: referring to Kurt Lewin's formula, an actor's performance in a given social field correlates with the amount of capital the actor possesses necessary for that social field. In Bourdieu's perspective, habitus serves as a more comprehensive factor than mere capital to comprehend a subject's interactions and levels of performance within a specific environment.

Thinking scheme: the categorical notions through which a subject conceives their actions, arising from the transformation of personal mental structures, social structures, and the context in which that person exists.

Hysteresis: the discrepancy between a person's habitus and the rules of the field they navigate.

Symbolic violence: an act of transgression resulting in an outcome that diverges from the agent's expectations. This agent is often guided by collective principles or expectations. When this sequence, a reasonable progression in line with common sense, is disrupted, it is perceived as violent by the individual who anticipated it.

Illusio: the degree of belief in a specific activity within a particular field determines the level of investment or effort put forth in that activity.

Business: the objective probability that a specific action will yield returns in the future.

Retention/Protention: in Husserl's phenomenological perspective (1991), retention refers to a social agent's unconscious grasp of objective possibilities in life. Protention describes how they project these possibilities into the present through immediate actions, based on their assessment of what they believe will be the real chances of a return on that action**.**

Social determinism: the viewpoint that a person's life follows an unchangeable social trajectory due to structural factors that inhibit transformation.

Reflexivity: the intellectual ability to critically assess our actions and identities.

Voice: in Hirschman's theory of social action, together with Exit (defection) and Loyalty (adherence to tradition), it represents a person's critical participation as a response to a situation of nonconformity. Voice is one of the three options available.

Auto-subversive cultural capital: cultural knowledge that possesses the potential to challenge one's social heritage (symbolic capitals) and critically alter the original habitus.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

> "By making visible the collective regularities or habits of which individuals are not always aware, by highlighting structures, mechanisms, or social processes that are rarely the product of the will of individuals while constantly passing through them. Intimately, it [sociology] inflicted on humanity a fourth narcissistic wound. After the Copernican wound which destroyed the belief according to which the Earth would be the center of the universe, after the Darwinian wound which ruined any vision of humanity radically separated from the animal kingdom, and after the Freudian wound which forces us to recognize that the psychic activity was not entirely conscious, the sociological wound brought down the illusion according to which each individual would be an isolated atom, free and master of his destiny, a small autonomous center of an experience of the world, with his choices, its decisions, and its wishes, without constraints or causes"
>
> Bernard Lahire, (2016, p7-8).

The research problem, rooted in the social context of this adult education thesis, centers on the impact of impoverished conditions on people's attitudes and knowledge regarding community affairs. This research investigates how an adult education program informed by sociology could enhance organized local democracy. This second chapter will review the literature supporting the adult education action utilized in this thesis's project. I began with the two intellectual traditions that shaped this thesis: the pragmatist American tradition of adult education, as proposed by John

Dewey, emphasizing the continuous reconstruction of life through reflective experience (Fischman & McCarthy, 2007), and the Latin American tradition of critical adult education initiated by Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970). I will also incorporate concepts from the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1993) that can be applied to adult education to enhance inquiry methods and inform learning processes concerning adult learners, their histories, and social contexts. I will highlight how this social perspective can be strengthened from a sociological viewpoint, promoting understanding and pedagogical action from a socially sensitive pragmatism.

Finally, in the last part of this section, I will explore the forms that a rational pedagogy could take. I will outline how sociology could help build a framework for pedagogical action that addresses the interests of this thesis: understanding people's assets and deficits; designing content and dynamics that could enhance the engagement and progress of adult learners; conceiving educational leadership that could support these efforts; and, finally, establishing the foundations of a teacher's reflexivity, from which the teacher can evaluate their own performance.

Pragmatist roots

In societies marked by significant social injustices, where the burden of social reproduction weighs heavily on a considerable segment of the population, the belief that education should primarily focus on the intellectual, psycho-affective, and social transformation of individuals, in addition to their integration within an existing social order, has been central to the development of educational theories since the nineteenth century. For instance, the "Education nouvelle" was a European international academic movement that emerged at the end of the 19th century. It was both critical of and reformist toward the school system, touching on ideological and practical

aspects, and was tied to a political utopia aimed at transforming education to help foster the emergence of a truly democratic society (Ferrer, 1908).

Adult education has played a crucial role in this progressive philosophy of education and society in general, particularly in the United States. The ideal of achieving emancipation through education persisted throughout the twentieth century, fostering the development of several critical pedagogies worldwide (Alhadeff-Jones, 2010). In the U.S., these educational initiatives initially gained acceptance and support from analytical and pragmatic philosophies, which were later reflected in the sociological contributions of the Chicago School (Chapoulie 2001).

In that order, the introduction of American and European philosophy at the center of sociological work is shaped by various thinkers, among the most prominent of whom are Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and William James. Peirce introduced pragmatism as a method of inquiry through which individuals encounter their ideas (Rorty, 1966). He conceived the pragmatist project through realization. William James integrated the relationship between individuals and their context as the content from which the pragmatist approach would engage in inquiry (Cometti, 2010). However, these conceptions of a philosophy of action lacked a more substantial purpose. This is what Dewey contributed to pragmatism: a political motivation and an objective, the democratic individual and their society. Therefore, Dewey introduced pragmatism to the educational field. His theoretical contributions are reflected in a collection of texts spanning more than twenty years.

Among Dewey's successors, educator Edward Lindeman was one of the first to reflect on adult education. His primary concern was not theoretical but focused on the practice of adult educators, where he linked social work with adult education and training for democracy. Lindeman continued his advocacy for popular education in his work, The Meaning of Education (1926),

where he laid the foundations of a plan for adult learning based on its potential to reflect and transform social practices. The transformative theory of learning builds upon the works of Dewey and Lindeman and is part of the legacy of pragmatic thinking within North American educational sciences. Jack Mezirow, whose primary work is Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (1991), elaborated on the concepts of transformative learning and perspective transformation in the late 1970s. Mezirow's work is rooted in his experience as a trainer and the evolution of intellectual reflection developed through engagement with various theoretical influences such as pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and critical pedagogy, as well as Habermas' social theory of communication (Mezirow, 1991). His theories demonstrate that emancipatory learning and critical thinking are central to the transformation processes characteristic of adulthood, which is why the goal of transformative learning is to empower the adult learner to reevaluate the frameworks he has developed in a non-critical manner throughout his life, to create new interpretative frameworks that more rationally and autonomously guide his future experiences, freeing him from cultural arbitrariness distortions.

These ideas closely resemble Bourdieu's observations regarding sociology's social or clinical functions for the public (Bourdieu, 2000). These functions aim to make individuals aware of their social history and empower them to take control of their lives by finding meaning in their past and present.

Revisiting Freire and Adult education tradition for social change

Closer to our Latin American context, we find the work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire, particularly his book "Pedagogy of Autonomy" (2012, 1997), which serves as his educational testament and the culmination of his extensive program focused on a "Pedagogy

of the Oppressed" (1970) and "Teachers as Cultural Workers" (2005). It is relevant to note that Freire's vision of education for liberation in Latin America came during the political, ideological, and social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

Freire made significant contributions to education, both theoretically and politically. His work provides an anthropological analysis of how the entrenched culture of poverty shapes individuals whose social (present) and cultural (historical) circumstances outweigh their desires. Here, Freire investigates the potential for escaping the confines of alienation and achieving a limited situation in which the adult learner transitions from naive transience to critical consciousness (Elias & Merriam, 2005). In this state, individuals begin to feel that they are gaining control over their lives, shifting from mere consumers to producers of their own history.

The sociological profile described by Freire, nearly universal under conditions of poverty, closely resembles what was observed in El Progreso during the recruitment process and the pre-assessment interviews with participants. Freire initially focused on working with individuals who were illiterate and had less access to information about the world than people do today. However, advances in information technology have altered some aspects of this situation. For instance, individuals today are more aware of the injustices they face than when Freire developed his thesis. Consciously or unconsciously, social subjects are more exposed to witnessing the inequalities they encounter regularly, mainly through social networks, as they see the stark and ever-growing contrasts between their living conditions and those of the privileged.

Another element from the past, during Freire's time, that does not exist today to the same extent is the political and ideological climate of the sixties, where political movements advocating for emancipation against oppression were prevalent. Today, these movements and ideological tendencies exist to a much lesser degree. This implies revisiting Freire's project and adapting it to

the new realities in the XXI century. This thesis proposes shifting its focus toward social organization rather than Freire's ambitious emancipation project, allowing the social organization of people through clear democratic principles to take its chance with the use of dialogic dynamics, such as Freire's outlines in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970).

The question remains: How can we ignite the flame that challenges the resignation and social inertia of today's individuals living in poverty and historical marginality? Any Freirean adult educator will likely seek, in the spirit of the pedagogy of the oppressed, to create conditions where people can believe in the hope for better days and the value of organized community social action to achieve them.

Psychologist Albert Bandura, known for his social learning theory (1977), provides a unified framework for analyzing people's conduct and beliefs. Social learning can be synthesized to define the formation of new behaviors through various processes involving the social environment. Bandura emphasizes the concept of personal efficacy, asserting that individuals are partial architects of their destiny, actively shaping their psychosocial functioning through mechanisms of personal agency, particularly the belief in their ability.

Among others, Bandura is part of a series of adult education theorists interested in how adults learn in social settings and dynamics, its social impact, and the philosophical and political principles it embodies. Both progressive and liberal humanistic traditions emphasize the moral value of adult education as a democratic imperative. From John Dewey to Edward Lindeman, along with Cremin and Knowles, adult education, particularly in the context of the United States, became a key element of American democracy (Merriam & Elias, 2005). Although their contributions help frame education as a right, mainly targeting historically disadvantaged populations, such as minorities and those from impoverished backgrounds, the decisive influence

for the field of adult educators who transformed it into a political arena came from radical and critical adult theorists. These theorists drew from the social sciences, grassroots institutions, and civil rights and social movement organizations. Among other factors, various concerns and sensibilities emerged. Anarchist and Marxist traditions such as Francisco Ferrer in Spain and Ivan Illich in Latin America, or feminist bell hooks in the U.S., integrated critically into adult education the question of authoritarianism and education as a social and political emancipation process.

Peter Jarvis integrated a sociological perspective into adult learning to comprehend how learners reconstruct knowledge from their everyday lives, viewing learning as a social practice (1991). His important contribution to adult education created a necessary bridge between education and social experience, continuing Lindeman's approach (1926). While other thinkers, including the Frankfurt School and Freire authors, have assumed a connection between social circumstances and adult education, Jarvis explicitly adopted a sociologically grounded perspective on the learner and his learning as a socially constructed individual and process, respectively.

Possibilism and the prophetic Imagination

Not long after Freire's time, Albert Hirschman, a Princeton-based economist who worked in developing countries, introduced a key concept for studying social and economic development: possibilism, defined by him as the exercise "to widen the limits of what is or is perceived to be possible, be it at the cost of lowering our ability, real or imaginary, to discern the probable" (Hirschman, 1971, p. 28). Possibilism can create new opportunities for starting over, acting as a form of social forgiveness of the current situation, which opens perspectives of hope, inspires thoughts, and empowers, through new ideas, the reconstruction of faith that change is possible and that there is promise for the future.

As a valuable lens to explore this thesis, I turned to the American tradition of the prophetic personality, where the imaginative idea that birthed the “good news” from prophetic tradition has supported the historical struggles of leaders and activists for civil, social, and economic rights in the United States. These movements raised their voices for economic justice and against racism and other types of harmful discrimination, educating populations that have suffered for centuries. However, they did not surrender; they resisted and, in many cases, transcended their conditions through songs, prayers, slogans, or church speeches; they have steadily elevated the flag of social justice and the right of dignity for all.

In his book, The American Prophets, Albert Raboteau (2016) analyzes the political work of figures like Fannie Lou Hamer and her representation of local voices from her community. The work also addresses Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, A.J. Muste, and Abraham Joshua Heschel, who, through their words and leadership, embraced social activism with compassion for victims of injustice. This generated an inspiring process for several generations, leading to militancy and mobilizations as people expressed themselves and organized their communities against war, poverty, inequality, and racism, along with all the elements that harmed the human spirit in 20th-century America.

In his work We Are the Leaders We Have Been Looking For (2024), Eddie Glaude focuses on four figures from the African American civil rights struggle: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Ella Baker, and Toni Morrison. He extracts key elements from each of these individuals, drawing heavily from the African American tradition of gathering in the streets, social organizations, and churches, where they denounced injustices and illuminated the path to a new American society—as Glaude notes, quoting Dewey on what philosophy should mean for political practice—which I interpret here as applicable to adult education—"as a method of locating and interpreting the more

serious conflicts that occur in life and a method of projecting ways for dealing with them: a method of moral and political diagnosis and prognosis." (Glaude, 2024, p. 15).

All of the figures cited above-impeached reality and, by doing so, opened the road for people to envision today as a possible tomorrow rather than merely a probable one tied to tradition. They exposed the compelling arguments for fighting for everyone's future, encouraging the oppressed to recognize the prestige of their struggles and the moral legitimacy and ethical elegance of their purposes. Undoubtedly, the actions of all these leaders can be seen as fascinating processes of adult education, offering lessons to incorporate in efforts such as fostering hope in impoverished and marginalized neighborhoods like El Progreso, to restore faith in the future and bring value to public affairs and the importance of organizing social action through democratic leadership.

This is precisely what Bell Hooks conveys in her *Teaching Community* (2003), stating that the most important aspect of a community is to foster hope, which is taught through what she calls "keepers of hope," a role that helps to transcend the boundaries of the probable, tying back to Hirschman's idea previously mentioned, and opens the gates of imagination to the possible. This proposal is advanced as a strategy for adult education by Preskill & Brookfield in *Learning As A Way of Leading* (2009) and by Fischman & McCarthy in *Dewey's Pragmatism as a Practice of Hope* (2007). Robert Westbrook, a notable scholar of Dewey's work, refers to the mission of pragmatism in his politics of truth as "Democratic Hope" (2005).

Adult education, sociology, and field theory

As this thesis is based on an adult education program that incorporates sociological elements to strengthen the pedagogical framework of action research, it is now necessary to

establish a bridge to understand what the sociology of education says that may be relevant to the practice of adult education and how that information informs my role as a principal investigator in this thesis. I will base this section on Bourdieu's critical sociology of education.

In reflective sociology, themes such as education, school, and adult learners are among the first developed by Pierre Bourdieu. The central focus of his work is to examine schools by analyzing people's social histories to explain their educational performances. Rather than reducing education to a purely academic issue, his works fit, as Hugrée (2020) suggested, within the framework of a general sociology of the symbolic dominance of cultural forms over others. For this reason, reflective sociology of education not only studies the backgrounds of learners but also discusses pedagogical authority and its arbitrary methods of transmitting academic and cultural content. Consequently, different outcomes arise between learners' performances, depending on the social closeness between the school's culture and the learners' culture of origin.

Starting from the concepts of habitus and field, Bourdieu and his colleague Passeron, with whom he co-authored his first two works on the sociology of education (The Inheritors and The Reproduction: 1970 and 1977, respectively), establish the connections among social inequality, cultural inequality, and educational inequality. The social agent, through processes of socialization from early childhood to adolescence and young adulthood, adopts a series of information and cultural skills inherited from their social environment (family social status, home and neighborhood culture, parents' socio-professional categories, etc.) that transform into a form of capital for action (reaction disposition or habitus). When they arrive at school, this student draws on that capital to meet the school's cultural demands through their habitus (understood as aptitude and attitude).

Although the correlation between social positioning and academic results has always been evident, Bourdieu and Passeron's sociological analysis presents a paradox: schools, rather than being mechanisms that diminish inequalities, are the ones that entrench and even exacerbate them. Due to various mechanisms affecting the interplay between academic supply and demand, they must be prepared to address this issue. In other words, the demands of the school and the dispositions of adult learners illustrate an ideology of individual merit, which the sociological analysis links to social class. Therefore, school success and failure are likely the results of the extent of literate culture to which learners were exposed at home and within the broader context of their upbringing.

The key aspect here is how this culture is acquired and the disposition that comes with it, expressed through interest (along with a fondness for academic or literary culture), intellectual knowledge (such as references to authors or books and general knowledge), and practical knowledge (including ways of speaking, writing, and behaving, etc.). Much of this culture is absorbed informally, often without the sender or receiver realizing it.

Bourdieu and Passeron transformed social inheritance into a key concept for understanding the varying degrees of learners' dispositions toward the learning offer. From this, the theory of learners' habitus in educational settings emerges, grounded in the concept of field, developed by Kurt Lewin (1951), establishing an explanatory framework for the relationship between individuals and their learning environments. In "The Inheritors," Bourdieu and Passeron propose possible ways to make education more democratic, beginning with a more suitable approach, content, and even more appropriate evaluation methods—measuring the process of evolution, for example, rather than just final results. Moreover, since time is limited, rational use is an effective means of pedagogical communication. For this thesis, Bourdieu's sociology aids in developing the

self-critical capacity of ethnography concerning the practices and automatism of any adult educator, who may unconsciously operate within the mechanisms of reproduction inherent in traditional education pedagogy.

Sociology highlights the necessity of a comprehensive pedagogy that fully understands the subjects it addresses. With these premises and a theoretical framework from sociology, the potential arises to build a pedagogical approach centered on the cultural agency of potential participants as the primary focus, aimed at providing what is lacking or needed for a specific purpose. In the following pages of this chapter, I will organize a series of ideas, framed by their authors and their works, that can pave the way to equip sociological tools that can (and how they can) support the pedagogical objectives in the workshop series of this project within various contexts poverty.

Rational Pedagogy

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological reflections on education compel us to examine its pedagogical applications from various perspectives. First, we must examine how we perceive and understand social issues in classrooms, particularly considering adult learners' habitus, including the impact of social determinants and socio-analysis on their academic potential. From this foundation, he developed ideas across a coherent yet dispersed set of publications throughout his 40-year academic career regarding educational strategies that could transform classroom dynamics.

To establish the foundation of our set of epistemic ideas, I will now discuss the following: how to approach the fundamentals for a rational pedagogy that begins from a sociological

perspective, which can help inform teachers about learners' social and cultural inequalities; furthermore, from that information, what learning issues can be pragmatically transformed to foster a more democratic and effective environment in adult learning experiences; and how personal experiences can be converted into intellectual knowledge by utilizing sociological tools such as socio-analysis and self-analysis as means through which pedagogical strategies can be implemented.

Bourdieu defines rational pedagogy as "enabling the greatest possible number of individuals to appropriate, in the shortest possible time, as completely and as perfectly as possible, the greatest possible number of the abilities which constitute school culture at a given moment" (Bourdieu, 1979, p75-76). If I apply this definition to the scope of this thesis, I can define rational pedagogy as optimizing the limited resources available—such as time, topics, and cultural accessibility of the participants—to cover as much content as possible and as effectively as I can during the time shared with the participants throughout the project.

This entails developing a work plan and a detailed design that prioritizes and organizes criteria for intellectual accessibility, time, and resources according to the project's overall interests while consistently allowing for flexibility to address any unforeseen situations that arise.

Dewey and Bourdieu, in a converging cause

There is a long tradition that places the role of the Social Sciences as an extension of the work that Philosophy has done for centuries. In a text aptly titled "Philosophy," Dewey (1929) emphasizes that the analysis of social realities must be conducted from the perspective of social

sciences since: “the business of philosophy is criticism of belief; that is, of beliefs that are so widely current socially as to be dominant factors in culture. Methods of critical inquiry into beliefs mark him off as a philosopher, but the subject matter he deals with is not his own. The beliefs themselves are social products, social facts, and social forces” (Dewey, 1929, p. 164). While the social sciences would study the phenomena directly, philosophy would analyze the beliefs about these phenomena since what it seeks is a “systematic intellectual statement of the operations of inquiry, test, and formulation that enter into the discovery of conclusions having a valid claim to acceptance, to belief” (Dewey, 1929, p. 168).

Other contemporary interpreters of the pragmatist tradition, such as Stanley Cavell, have similarly advanced this line of thought (Naoko, 2012). From this perspective, the social sciences established by philosophers like Dewey and Durkheim represent an update of philosophical work, creating an organized empirical connection with reality and a practical analysis of experience that identifies its regularities, scopes, and probable significances.

Another meeting point between Dewey and reflexive sociology is their shared belief in rejecting the explanation of social facts through individual psychology because, for him: “social phenomena involve certain categories that are distinctive and unique, and hence not to be resolved into the physical, biological or psychological. The primary problem of the method is then to discover just what are these distinctive social marks and categories”. (Dewey, 1929, p. 175). Most of the work done in education typically focuses on learners' psychological aspects, sidelining their social history and characteristics. By designing educational programs without analyzing social relationships and the social positions of learners, psychological approaches limit the view of adult learners’ capabilities (reflecting dispositions of attitudes and aptitudes), which are often significantly influenced by the individuals' social histories. By framing these phenomena within a

psychological context, the significance of the past is reduced when any given individual is shaped fundamentally by (his)story.

The social aspect of people's lives should be central to any educational purpose. It includes social inequalities, family, cultural or even neighborhood heritages, and everything that arises from them. It must also consider any input, materials, or ideas contributing to understanding classrooms before that classroom formally takes place. This applies to any learning environment. In this context, the concept of the social is closely connected to individuals, their intimacy, emotions, bodies, and perspectives on life, among other factors. All these issues surrounding inequalities raise countless critical questions for adult educators, not only because of the insights they provide about various aspects of learners' lives but also due to the valuable contributions they generate, which help teachers rethink their pedagogical programs and practices.

Objectivity regarding one's subjectivity

In a sociological perspective on pedagogy, learners' lives serve as essential material for identifying and constructing data about the representations, beliefs, practices, and values of the populations being studied. These elements create the social and cultural context that informs and clarifies the social life and history of adult learners. An interest in social genesis will guide us in understanding how history shapes and develops the unique way in which an individual grounds his existence or experience in reality. It involves more than just life experience. My aim is to place that life experience within a social framework, encompassing its logic, structures, familiar sources, and beliefs.

These epistemological and methodological issues are central to the approach to socio-analysis and self-analysis, as the object of social reading is defined through individual context. In this sense, the experience must be rigorously framed in relation to the social aspect to avoid falling into what Bourdieu (1986) called the “biographical illusion.” Bourdieu sought to distance himself from the subjective reconstruction that individuals often create of their life histories, which typically lacks connection to the social structures that have shaped not only individuals' trajectories and social positions but also their perceptions of them.

This sociologically based perspective suggests that individuals reconstruct the existing “social" aspects of their histories. In other words, starting from the stories told by individuals, it accounts for the characteristics and social properties that have influenced their lives, shaping who they are and leading them to think and act in specific ways. The numerous interviews in the work directed by P. Bourdieu, The Weight of World (2000), illustrate the potential of this perspective that begins with an analysis of personal stories of suffering and impasses, placing them within the social and collective framework where they make sense. Bourdieu's primary focus is to offer a scientific tool for understanding, which is considered a critical stage of transformation.

From this standpoint, sociological epistemology offers an effective way for an individual learner to understand their subjectivity from a relatively legitimate (and validated) perspective as the one offered by social sciences. In this context, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology aligns with the ideas of Dewey and Durkheim, serving as a bridge between sociology and our pedagogical approach. The concept of habitus, developed by Bourdieu, acts as our connection point between social structures and mental frameworks, as it defines “a set of habits and dispositions, typical of a culture or social environment, instilled in the individual during the process of socialization” (Ansart & Akoun, 1999, p 251). From this definition, it is clear that using this concept may assist educational

efforts in generating practices that raise awareness about the representations and sensations manifested in "perception, thought, and action schemes" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 91) and are typically internalized or incorporated through the process of socialization.

A clear connection emerges here between the pedagogical proposal of this thesis and the sociologies of Émile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu regarding the processes through which social history is pedagogically externalized and traced back to its origins by social actors themselves.

Thus, the permanence of the past in people's lives is reflected in Bourdieu's definition of habitus, as it is the product of their entire biographical experience. My aim here is that once habitus is sociologically defined as a concept, pedagogy could bring it to the surface of understanding by the social agent himself, allowing the adult learner to visualize himself as the product of a social story. In this way, he can concurrently become a reflective sociologist of his subjectivity. Indeed, building on the contributions of Durkheim and Bourdieu, this research will illustrate the reproductive and coercive dimensions of the social in adult learners, which we will use to support our pedagogy in exploring their emancipatory potential.

In this context, the methodology is a pedagogy of subjectivation, which views the adult learner as a product of social history and a co-producer of their history. From this perspective, the adult learner can recognize and confront the factors that shape his being, allowing for restructuring or emancipation from those factors. Therefore, the intervention I propose through pedagogy aims to enhance the understanding of historicity in adult learners, revealing how their past influences the present regarding capabilities and how it impacts their future through motivation conditioned by past perspectives.

Studying the weight of the (present) past in peoples' lives means understanding the connection between individual history and social history. These two sources of social production

and reproduction cannot be separated from one another, as their embeddedness forges the scenarios that individuals use to shape their narratives. For this reason, Pierre Bourdieu examines the weight of history by incorporating habitus when he tells us, "History in the incorporated state is expressed through habitus, the product of historical acquisition, which allows the appropriation of historical knowledge." In that order, he adds that “the unconscious is never more than the forgetting of history that history itself produces when it realizes the objective structures that it generates in these quasi-natures that are habitus. History incorporated made nature and therefore forgotten as such, habitus is the active presence of all the past of which it is the product” (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 94).

From this perspective, the history of individuals illustrates how the patrimony of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—is shaped by the structure of the social field in which individuals participate. In that order, each habitus develops a space of possibilities, reinforced by what the adult learner possesses in a practical domain of the learning activity. The adult learner’s investment in engaging with any adult education program—essentially the social field of the community in which it operates—will be directly linked to the gap between their subjective expectations and the objective probabilities of returns from these hopes. This practical domain of the social game relates to the learner's position in this field and the capital they can put into play since it is instead a "principle that generates strategies to face unforeseen situations," making possible many "anticipations” (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 257).

Since the publication of Bourdieu and Passeron’s seminal works, there has been a genuine concern within the academic community to consider a new pedagogy that takes into account sociological findings and tools to reduce the social reproduction of inequalities occurring in classrooms (Sadovnik, 1995; Garcia & Oller, 2015; Emdin, 2017; De Cock & Pereira, 2019). This

concern extends to Adult Basic Education and Higher Education as well (Jarvis, 2008; 2012; 2017; Preece, 2020).

Given the above, the question of the productive relationship between pedagogy and sociology, which is the subject of this work, cannot be viewed as a division of disciplinary territories separating pedagogical specialists from social specialists. It is possible to develop a cooperative dialogue to establish a common foundation for practical purposes, such as pedagogical diagnosis, content, leadership, and classroom dynamics informed by sociological knowledge. In theory, both disciplines ultimately address the same purpose: social change.

From experiential to intellectual knowledge

The sociological possibilities of adult education allow us to understand the importance of social determinisms in the relationships among social structures, individual mental frameworks, and classroom performances, both personally and collectively. Using methods already validated in other fields, adult pedagogy transforms sociology in the classroom into a scientific approach that helps adult learners build their understanding of the world and themselves.

By employing rigorous tools to understand the social landscape and pursuing a political mission aimed at communicating essential information about the cultural conditions affecting people's lives, sociology itself becomes pedagogical. The strategy I intend to explore here focuses on empowering adult learners to read and write, in a Freirean sense, their personal histories within their contexts. Conversely, it involves adapting to these conditions more consciously and effectively. Thus, in the practice of a sociology-based pedagogy, the adult learner assumes both the role of an object and a subject in a narrative where the goal is for them to become the self-

author of their story, first and foremost comprehending the socially inherited pre-existing conditions they encounter.

Indeed, the sociological discourse has a pedagogical scope, first serving as a reflective moment and then as an emancipatory opportunity for individuals who engage with it, making it a kind of appropriation once the narrative is mastered. In this sense, Dewey aligns with Bourdieu's belief in social knowledge as a key means of freedom. From the "outside," we can derive the philosophical (understanding), political (motivation), and socially grounded conditions that make freedom possible. This is where education, through a pedagogy informed by sociology, can achieve its fullest democratic aims and methods.

While the commitment of the individuals involved is essential, it is important to highlight two ideas in Bourdieu's consideration (2000). First, the challenge of how individuals can attain the necessary reflexivity to understand a social world on their own; and second, his belief that a person can navigate their own life, potentially adopting a new or different set of habits. In this context, we see the emancipatory nature of both issues, as revealed through their respective intervention devices, which primarily focus on valuing the social experiences of the subjects in question. For instance, the four research hypotheses that form the theoretical foundations for adult learning in Lindeman's work from 1926 (Balleux, 2000 p.267):

- Education is life itself, not a simple preparation for a future life: education establishes links with life.
- Adult education does not seek to satisfy professional ideals; it is designed around the needs and interests of the adult learner.
- Adult education involves real, lived situations rather than academic subjects. It focuses on practice rather than theory.

- The best resource in adult education is the learner's experience, the key element and “the living manual of the adult learner.”

Lindeman's proposal shifts the central focus of pedagogical practice to the experiences of adult learners, prioritizing them over academic knowledge. Sociology and pedagogy can intersect precisely at this point. In this thesis proposal, sociology-based pedagogical practice examines the connections between the motivations and expectations of adult learners and the institutions they are associated with engage.

This helps bridge an essential connection between Pierre Bourdieu's sociology and Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (2000). Based on the meaning-making process for adult learners, derived from a constructivist perspective and using life stories as its primary analytical tool within the framework of biographical research, adult learners can, according to Mezirow (2000), change their forms of representation and recover more from challenging circumstances. Transformative Learning Theory is grounded in an integral transformation process with individual self-reflection as its foundation.

Its essential focus is educating individuals' actions and re-signifying their mindset, which becomes crucial for change's potential. A possible improvement in this thesis can occur from exploring how this can be achieved from social learning and through communities of practice and the practices of a community. For this, a vision of subjects shaped by social structures must occur to enable individuals to understand the weight of social factors surrounding them. In this context, Bourdieu suggests implementing a framework in which sociologists can reveal and teach the assumptions that shape a classroom's representations of social reality, including the social realities

within the classroom itself. He believes any tools and information from the social sciences should be mobilized (Bourdieu 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu conceived his sociological enterprise as emancipatory. He believed individuals can achieve social emancipation together when they transcend their social heritage by understanding what determines it (Bourdieu, 1981). In that order, it is worth noting that the pedagogical methodology of Paulo Freire and the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu converge on the question of subjectivation, as seen in the position proposed by this thesis when it seeks to expand the adult learners' capacities for historicist introspection, beyond the practical sense from which the adult learner understands his life through mere practical experiences. Hence, following Freire contributes to the development of an important reflection on the necessary consideration of the link between knowledge and power.

At this stage of the process, the first of the three axes under which the method presented by Paulo Freire in his work The Pedagogy of Autonomy (1997) is organized includes consciousness, the decoding of generative words, and group work. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of his method is that it assumes the life experience of populations to be "informed." In that order, Bourdieu's theoretical framework for understanding social work encourages us to reflect on our personal biographies, as the primary goal of socio-analysis is to undertake reflective work on three sets of presuppositions[5]:

First, I will explore the presuppositions related to the adult learner's current social location: Where do you come from? Who is your family? Who are your friends and neighbors? What is your neighborhood like? Second, I will examine the presuppositions tied to their social history: Who am I, and who are my people? A third aspect addresses their position within the

[5] However, in pedagogical terms, I would refer to an expanded biography, both socially (the field of scope) and sociologically (the concept and method).

educational field: What am I doing here? Moreover, the fourth aspect concerns their beliefs in academic knowledge: How can I transcend my heritage through faith in an adult education community program?

The social location

In sociology, the epistemological basis for studying social agents is the person, not the individual. The notion of the individual creates the idea of an independent atom acting on his or her own. At the same time, the concept of personhood implies the social structures within the individual. Studying social agents' social location is crucial for activating the socio-analysis process. A socially expanded biographical approach may provide a more pedagogical base to the quantitative conception of social facts, allowing a more penetrating understanding of social reality. This tradition is rooted in various philosophical schools of thought, starting with Dewey's pragmatism, whose ideas proliferated in the educational field of critical theories (especially within the Frankfurt School), serving as a foundation for several critical approaches to adult education, which granted the singular experience a specific epistemological status.

According to Lewin's theory of field, the social world operates from a topological perspective (2015), where space and the positions within it are crucial in understanding structure, agents' interests, strategies, capabilities, and dynamics. To comprehend one's position in life, the social agent needs to understand their role in the social world. By analyzing their social location, adult learners can grasp two things: first, the question of place and how it generates a discernible series of life conditions and characteristics of social agents. Secondly, while their inquiries from their location are unveiled and made public through classroom activities, adult learners recognize

the social nature as an everyday reality, rather than an individual one. This is why Lewin is regarded as a social psychologist.

The own social history

The voices of adult learners, especially their life stories, hold significant pedagogical potential. These narratives often reveal social aspects of adult learners and provide crucial information that helps us understand society and how it functions through biography.

For this reason, it is essential to establish an epistemology of life stories to access their subjectivities, revealing various aspects of society through their experiences. In this sense, socio-analysis can be developed by considering the concept of habitus to understand the effects of internalizing the structures of the social world on the actors. Recognizing that habitus shapes specific ways of "being in the world" based on the subject's association with a particular group or social class, the adult learner must confront his worldview rooted in his history.

To challenge social heritage, Pierre Bourdieu sees history as a burden from which individuals must free themselves (Bourdieu, 2000). Consequently, history is considered a compilation of decisions, particularly the social heritage that sociologists must address to provide individuals with the tools to escape social constraints by revealing how social influences affect them. Social inheritance creates a limiting framework and a variety of "capitals" that individuals use, through habitus and thought patterns, in their interactions. Pierre Bourdieu advocates for a socio-analysis that highlights the agent's relationship with history. Personal narratives uncover an individual's social history. The goal is to connect all of these memories—whether recent or ancient—to generate new self-knowledge from a social context perspective.

The objectification of the individual helps us understand the influences shaping our personal history. In this context, Bourdieu's work encourages us to investigate the social conditions that impact knowledge production, which for students include their academic choices, economic circumstances, and the cultural environment in which they operate. From this perspective, adult learners' narratives are directed toward experiences, situations, and contexts to explore their origins, dynamics, variations, and more within their socio-historical frameworks. Ultimately, within adult education programs, adult learners conduct a comparative analysis of collective narratives to comprehend and identify the agents involved in their daily practices. The goal is to gather all the sociological information necessary to establish a creative and (socio)logical explanation based on biographical material.

The main point will focus on adult learners' discourse related to their life paths and socio-historical contexts to uncover the presuppositions associated with the social experiences that form their "original habitus." Starting from socio-analysis, which, as Bourdieu states, "is different from any introspective enterprise" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 178), we will adopt the pedagogical perspective of Lindeman (1926), whose scientific methodology emphasizes three specific elements: practice, the apprentice, and their centers of interest. In this way, knowledge will be situated on the adult learner's side, as the training's exteriority is directed toward the apprentice's interiority. This approach will enable us to understand the various ways in which individuals live, think, and act within their own contexts or environments, illuminating their "point of view" and showcasing the knowledge gained from their experiences so they can recognize the influences of their social environment that the same habitus may limit them from consciously considering. In this thesis, training will be directed toward the needs of adult learners and the transformation of the knowledge gained through their experiences.

Position in the educational field

Pierre Bourdieu made significant contributions to academia by revealing the processes of domination and the sources of symbolic violence in education. The second socio-analytical effort focuses on adult learners' participation in the learning environment. It highlights how they engage and perceive their roles within this specific context: the proposed adult education program. No longer is it a matter of the adult learner's original habitus; instead, the focus shifts to their specific habits as adult learners in this second stage. According to Bourdieu, learners, throughout their time in an educational system that perpetuates inequalities, gradually and imperceptibly develop the conversion—more or less radical, depending on the distance—of their original habitus to fit school habitus, which often goes largely unnoticed (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 20).

Therefore, socio-analysis is a powerful tool for understanding issues of power, distinction, symbolic violence, and class struggle, among the many challenges social agents encounter in society. In this thesis, I focus on developing a vision of biographies that considers both structural and personal dimensions that could make individuals recognize their past and their sociological present. This will encourage self-reflection, allowing them to see, among other factors, how belonging to a particular social class influences their academic successes and failures. Their attitude toward studies will be evident in their history, education, habits linked to their origins, social and cultural capital, and more. This approach will facilitate a shift from subjective to objective reflexivity, emphasizing all the determinants that shape knowledge production.

It is established that the experience we acquire, as Schütz and Luckmann say, is "biographically articulated" (1973). This concept requires the mobilization of a "differentiated biographical capital" that partly results from the position individuals occupy in social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1979). In this sense, the distinctions in the objective situations of individuals will be considered based on the various resources they possess (education, income, social capital, etc.).

This is precisely why self-analysis may contribute critically to engaging a sense of autonomy in the adult learner, whose capacity for emancipation or resistance will depend on their social context. Following Freire's Pedagogy of Autonomy, seeking social and cultural integration among students is essential for understanding their empowerment across all areas of life, particularly within the school environment. Ideally, for schools, this will involve transcending predominantly communicative pedagogies and allowing adult learners to experience their respective journeys of "empowerment" (Freire, 2013) [2006]).

An educational approach to auto-analysis

The two elements involved in this pedagogical methodology through socio-analysis are, on one hand, utilizing the biographical field and, on the other hand, engaging the adult learner's participation in the educational field. These must be connected to a third element that involves facilitating the transition from socio-analysis to auto-analysis. This phase is illustrated in Bourdieu's self-analysis of his history, particularly in the perspective he developed regarding his home environment following his academic recognition. This experience was crucial for him as it directed him towards the study of sociology (Bourdieu, 2000), as it enabled him to interpret the meaning of the symbolic violence that impacted and suppressed him.

Indeed, this self-analysis is enlightening because it suggests that the analysis of symbolic violence can be perceived as a way of mitigating the violence felt towards one's environment of origin. This viewpoint connects to adult learners' observations and studies of the social world, as well as to the actions of an educator who reinforces the theoretical foundation of his teaching through the practical reasoning of adult learners.

Therefore, the aim of socio-analysis is to invigorate, from a pedagogical standpoint, the relationship between institutional structures and the cognitive frameworks of agents in the field. In this vein, the teacher should stress to adult learners that learning is always linked to the context of a specific biography. This is why biographical learning pertains to the spheres of life that could lead, within the framework of this thesis, to a sociological interpretation of biographical learning, which highlights the connection between biography and social institutions. Learning spaces act as environments that are essential to the spheres of life, concurrently integrated within a narrative that unfolds interactively and biographically.

Starting with the significance of the experiences lived by the actors, one can turn to socio-analysis to reconcile "a structuralist analysis, which tends to gather objective relationships, independent of individual consciousness and will […] and a phenomenological approach, interactionist or ethnomethodological, which aims to capture the experiences that agents have of interactions, social contacts, and the contributions they make to the mental and practical construction of social realities" (Bourdieu, 1987).

The goal here is to address the tensions between structural analysis and the consideration of experience, as structural analysis cannot be separated from the social relations that shape individuals' conflicts and behaviors. In this context, the potential for transforming an individual, despite social influences, depends on the work they do on themselves and their environment.

Pragmatist reconstruction of the democratic ideal in Adult education

The transformative role of socio-analysis in motivating adult learners is illustrated in Bourdieu's confessions: “For me, sociology played the role of a socio-analysis that helped me understand and endure things (starting with myself) that previously seemed unbearable” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 182). This highlights the educational benefits of socio-analysis in learning about reality. Indeed, this approach may foster the emergence of a reflective individual, allowing people to be the protagonists of the process.

Examining practices from the history of life and biographical research through the lens of emancipation prompts critical questioning of their purposes. Employing biographical approaches in education and training reveals a practice centered on emancipatory goals, framed by the tensions and contradictions present in adult learners. Moreover, retelling lived experiences could foster a historical understanding of emancipatory processes. Following Freire's vision in "Pedagogy of Autonomy," a sociological theory of adult education may activate the social process of personal reconstruction in a Deweyan take.

Therefore, this thesis adopts this pedagogical vision, recognizing that achieving it requires more than simply "limiting ourselves to a simple conversion of consciences and wills,” since “the foundation of symbolic violence does not reside in deluded consciences, which would suffice to illuminate, but rather in the inclinations shaped by structures of domination that produce them” (Bourdieu, 2010, p 62).

This aligns with what Dewey expressed in his article titled "Social Change and Its Human Direction," where he examines the interactive nature of all social events. He states, "What happens socially is always, in short, an interaction of present human desire and determination with existing,

or present, conditions" (Dewey, 1930, p. 366). The idea that human actions depend on specific material, intellectual, or social conditions does not imply, as we have established, that they are merely reduced to determinisms by them. He further asserts, "There are no historical forces that will shape the future, for what operates is precisely and only what is present" (1930, p. 365).

In this order, my proposal for developing a pedagogical methodology from a sociological perspective is grounded in the framework of social order analysis and the theoretical tools created by Bourdieu, whose work highlights the importance of enhancing our understanding and efforts (Accardo, 2006). For various reasons, the theory of socially based transformative learning, situated within transformation theories proposed by Mezirow (2001), facilitates change at two levels: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. On the one hand, meaning schemes pertain to the reflective learning we encounter when addressing "everyday" problems, which is an integral part of the thinking process. On the other hand, meaning perspectives guide reflection and action in our daily lives regarding what seems most evident. Therefore, pursuing perspective during the learning process is essential to foster significant changes in meaning place.

To achieve this objective, we will revisit the habitus developed by Bourdieu, as there is undoubtedly a habitus among the lower classes that connects them to or distances them from academic pursuits. This habitus, which is our focus, has yet to be transformed despite including individuals experiencing poverty in universities. In this regard, Bourdieu's concept remains entirely relevant and valid, as the differences between the rich and the poor persist unchanged by the formation of class habitus within the educational sphere. Mezirow's model helps us understand the challenges of perspective transformations for adult learners. His interest also encompasses the sequences of valuable learning activities involved in perspective transformation, which do not

align with fixed stages of development but with sequential moments of meaning clarification (Mezirow, 2001).

It is essential to emphasize that perspective transformation, as the author indicates, is also a social process in which "the others" play a crucial role.

From this perspective, Dewey's approach to reconstructing the object and method of philosophy is viewed as a significant step in rebuilding social experience. In this context, meaning is central to Mezirow's vision. The learning process can be seen as an enhancement of one's ability to articulate a new experience, conceptualize it, internalize it, and subsequently act on it. This educational process has the potential to cultivate awareness that leads to the reinterpretation and integration of personal experiences within social and collective contexts.

I want to conclude this chapter with a statement from Wright Mills, the American sociologist who was primarily influenced by pragmatism, highlighting the importance of sociology in the comprehensive education of democratic citizens' spirits:

> "This role requires that individuals and the public be given confidence in their capacities to reason, and by individual criticism, study, and practice, to enlarge its scope and improve its quality. It requires that they be encouraged, in George Orwell's phrase, to 'get outside the whale,' or in the wonderful American phrase, 'to become their men.' To tell them that they can 'really' know social reality only by depending upon a necessarily bureaucratic kind of research is to place a taboo, in the name of Science, upon their efforts to become independent men and substantive thinkers. It undermines the confidence of the individual craftsman in his ability to know reality. It is, in effect, to encourage men to fix their social beliefs by reference to the authority of an alien apparatus, and it is, of course, in line with, and is reinforced by, the whole bureaucratization of reason in our time. The industrialization of academic life and the fragmentation of social science problems cannot result in a liberating educational role for social scientists. For what these schools of thought take apart, they tend to keep it apart in tiny pieces, which they claim to be very specific. However, all they could thus be sure of are abstracted fragments. It is precisely the job of

> liberal education, the political role of social science, and its intellectual promise, to enable men to transcend such fragmented and abstracted milieu: to become aware of historical structures and their place within them" (Wright Mills, 1959, p.189).

If I could command you and myself, Meno, I would not have asked whether virtue can be taught until we first determine "what it is." However, since you only focus on controlling me, your slave, and never on mastering yourself — such is your understanding of freedom — I must submit to you, for you are irresistible. Thus, I now need to explore the qualities of a concept whose nature I do not yet know.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This thesis starts with an interrogation: How can an adult education program on democratic leadership and community affairs, centered on a Neighborhood Council, be designed to interest people historically marginalized and excluded from political participation?

To address this question, I designed a research project comprising five workshops centered on community social action based on action research. This project includes three collaborative work axes involving the program participants: collectively investigating the community's problems, proposing specific social actions through the Neighborhood Council, and learning democratic leadership to implement these measures comprehensively and effectively for the common good, social justice, and the dignity of all individuals in the area. These represented three collaborative investigations within the same experimental framework. To achieve these objectives, I integrated the methods of sociology (Bourdieu et al., 2021; Accardo, 1997) into the foundational training of an adult education program influenced by Paulo Freire's (1970) principles of social learning, exploring and understanding the social world from a clinical perspective (Bourdieu, 1997). This perspective aims to find solutions that enhance the lives of individuals and the community, particularly in contexts historically impacted by poverty and social challenges marginalization.

Like any critical exercise conducted in a series of meetings, we chose the action-research method because it is one of the standard methods used in adult education, closely aligned with the reflexivity of sociological research. Given the constraints of resources (time, research means, researcher's context, potential data collection), reflexive ethnography (Jerolmack & Khan, 2018;

Brice Heath & Street, 2008) was necessary for analyzing and representing a participant observation exercise, such as the one undertaken in this thesis. This approach was also employed by Freire in his work on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2018; Darder, 2018) and has been utilized in many qualitative investigations in education and transformative practices (Lutrell, 2010). Moreover, Kurt Lewin's action research method plays with the field theory he developed (Kaufmann, 1968), converging on epistemological and methodological levels.

Kurt Lewin's ideas established the methodology for action research in profound ways for two primary reasons. First, I intended to implement a practice-oriented approach that enhances results and refines the methods to achieve those outcomes, a critical aspect of conducting action research in organizations (Coghlan, 2019). Second, within this same framework, Lewin and his field theory contribute to the social sciences and serve as the foundation for reflective sociology (Accardo, 1997), which further develops concepts such as cultural capital, habitus, symbolic violence, illusion, and hysteresis. In the context of this thesis, these operational notions transformed the workshop into a distinct field, governed by its own social laws.

As a principal investigator in an adult learners' facilitation program, I utilized socio-analysis, as proposed by Bourdieu for professional sociologists, as a tool for pedagogical use, instructor assessment, and self-reflection (Bourdieu, 2022).

Additionally, I aimed to explore potential ways to rationalize teachers' leadership and planning from a sociological perspective to better understand public work and develop collaborative strategies through action-learning practices. I strived to make the pedagogical goals more accessible for my participants who come from and live in poverty conditions.

Study Design

Four foundational principles underpin the strategy directing the design and planning of this thesis. Here is a summary:

1. How to approach the subject- The convergence of three complementary disciplines: political science (local democracy and social organization), sociology (knowledge and methods), and adult education (strategies for social change).

2. Why act - Dewey's pragmatism emphasizes the importance of action in shaping reality. A fundamental principle of human action is to experiment with change through inquiry.

3. Focus on the primary social issue of the research—Bourdieu's social action theory suggests that individuals living in persistent, impoverished conditions, lacking hope and deeply rooted in their culture, often remain stagnant. To overcome historical inertia, social agents in these situations must envision a hopeful and attainable future in order to engage with mechanisms that can ultimately lead to change. According to Bourdieu, social inquiry can clarify misconceptions and promote a disposition toward change.

4. Building meanings of action to achieve social mobilization - This study revisits Freire's theory of social learning action, emphasizing the aim of social organization (rather than Freire`s political emancipation) and revitalizing people's civic imagination as a vital strategy for fostering aspirations for change. It draws on the American tradition of social prophets.

Research Design rationale

Based on previous principles, the following workshops were designed with specific objectives:

1. Establishing participant's trust and confidence in the project through involvement during the pre-assessment interviews and recruitment process.
2. Along with participants, assess standardized concepts of community, dignity, and social justice in relation to their actual conditions to shift people's focus toward their interests and motivations. (Workshops 1 & 2).
3. Relaunching and retaining participants' motivation by involving them in inquiry actions that identify and address community issues and their causes consequences. (Workshops 2 & 3).
4. Cultivate participants' social imagination through exercises that explore problems and solutions as a rehearsal for what the future could be like. (Workshops 3 & 4).
5. Integrating the envisioned future created by participants aids in structuring group planning, thereby establishing the concept of possibilism. (Workshop 5).
6. Outline democratic leadership principles and concretize examples of their application in the community by understanding people's social history. (Workshop 5)

The program's plan

PI conducted five recorded group workshops (1.5hrs/e) over two months in which participants learned about the following:

(1) sociological perspective of notions such as community, dignity, social justice, leadership, and democratic principles;

(2) making sense of official socioeconomic data of communities, training in ethically informed data collecting methods and how it may help social change and local democracy;
(3) analysis of neighborhood data provided by SIUBEN;
(4) Data was used for Neighborhood Council action planning. Before the first group workshop, in-depth interviews with the same participants evaluated their motivation, social knowledge about the community, democratic practices, and the functions and duties of the Neighborhood Council. After concluding the fifth group workshop, final individual interviews were conducted to assess participant learning outcomes.

All exercises were recorded using a recording device. The PI active participant observation memos, workshop sessions, and interview transcripts were also included for analysis. The workshops will require a 15-day intermission to process the data and inform the next seminar.

The data analysis will be supported by empirical evidence, highlighting participants' voices. It will also be critically analyzed in conversation with the literature and concepts of adult education.

Research Design

- Recruitment process

Open recruitment sessions were held where participants were informed about the study (its purposes, activities, methodology, and protocol of actions). The invitation method was word of mouth, addressed to adult members of the community who are part of and not part of the Neighborhood Council. They were 30-minute open sessions where information was given about

the project, its characteristics and objectives, activities and schedules, calendar and methodology, and the need for recording the activities, interviews, and surveys exclusively for academic purposes. Also, data confidentiality issues were socialized. The informed consent form was read, and the participants, when they agreed, were free to sign it. That happened in the first session due to reasons explained in Chapter 4.

- Pre-assessment session

The PI conducted a special session with 12 preliminary interviews (20-30mns/e).

- Workshop 1

In the first workshop, an overview of the social world and democracy was presented through the following questions:

1. What is a community, and how does it work?

Concepts: individual and dignity; structures and dynamics of society: culture, socialization, and social exchanges; economic, social, and political institutions; and social justice. Emphasis on the leading social issues in the DR today.

2. What is democracy in general, and what should it be in the context of poverty?

Concepts: Democracy as participation; human rights as social, economic, cultural, and political rights for people to live in freedom and social justice. Democracy as a dignifying response to economic and social vulnerability and inequality (emphasizing the Dominican Constitution's

defense of universal dignity, equality, and the social participation of people in building their history).

Participants completed a session review questionnaire at the end.

- Community data collection by SIUBEN and PI's analysis

As part of its institutional mission, SIUBEN (the Dominican State agency in charge of collecting demographic and socioeconomic information on populations living in contexts of poverty) carried out a demographic and socioeconomic census of the community of El Progreso during the third week of August, by a period of one week.

None of the participants in this research participated in the census data collection process. Only SIUBEN officers did it, and future participants accompanied them.

Information gathering and processing:

One week to gather information by SIUBEN.

Two weeks for statistical information processing by SIUBEN.

A week of analysis of the results and preparation for the next workshop by PI.

- Workshop 2

The social issues of the community in which the participants live were addressed and discussed from the statistics presented by SIUBEN, and how these problems can be specified from a better understanding of them:

a. What is social research, and how can it improve my understanding of the community?
b. How social sciences may inform and orient local democracy and Neighborhood Council actions with equity and social justice criteria.
c. How can action research be conducted by applying and analyzing a survey such as SIUBEN on the community?
d. Making sense of SIUBEN socioeconomic neighborhood data and training in ethically informed data collection methods (SIUBEN officials will participate in this workshop by sharing how they carried out their data collection process of the 815 community households).

Participants completed a session review questionnaire at the end.

- Workshop 3

Analysis of a community issue starting from the data provided by SIUBEN.

The third workshop was carried out, where a reflective analysis was held as a democratic response to the social problems and situations of the community:

a. Results presentation

b. Analysis of results

c. Discussion of results

d. Conclusions

Participants completed a session review questionnaire at the end.

- Workshop 4

Discuss two possible measures to be taken by Neighborhood Council action planning to cultivate the social imagination as a social action.

In a fourth workshop, a community action plan was organized:

a. Democracy is a response to people's problems.

b. Principle of democratic rationality (optimization of social action of equity)

e. Research group presentations

f. Discussion and outlining a plan

Participants completed a session review questionnaire at the end.

- Workshop 5

A conversation between the participants and two state agencies was held to explore possibilities for working together around two community issues—a final talk by PI on democratic and educational leadership.

Participants completed a session review questionnaire at the end.

- Post-assessments interviews

The final round of individual interviews was passed on to the participants, who were asked about their experiences. The PI conducted nine individual final interviews (20-25mns/e)

Information needed from areas

The target number of participants for each workshop was 12 continuous participants.

Participants were asked to complete the following documents during the study: All forms described below are attached at the end of this template. (1) Research plan (summary) (2) Consent Form (3) Pre-Assessment Questionnaire (4) Workshop Survey at the end of each group workshop (5) Post-Assessment Questionnaire

Table 1. List of activities, occurrences, and duration of participants were engaged in

Name of Task or Procedure (*e.g., individual audio recorded interview*)	Number of occurrences (*e.g., twice*)	Activity Duration (e*.g., 30 minutes, each time*)	Total time per participant (*e.g., one day, two interviews, 60 minutes total*)	Describe the data collected
Individual audio recorded interviews	Twice	30-45mns, each time	Two days, two interviews, 40mns total	Recorded interview (pre and post)
Group Workshops audio recorded	Five times	1.5hrs, each time	Five days, 1.5hrs each time, 6hrs total.	Audio recorded, active participant observation notes.
Workshops surveys audio recorded	Four times	3mns, each time	Four days, four verbal survey, 12mns total.	Recorded workshop surveys
Final focus group discussion	Once	One hour	One day, one focus group, one-hour total	Audio recorded, active participant observation notes.

Total hours of participation for all tasks: 9 hours

Total duration of participation: 7 days, in 2 months

During the information session, research subjects signed consent forms describing their consent to participate in the study and to be recorded. All other individuals must also complete a consent form before entering the meeting room.

Participants were not monetarily compensated for their participation.

Methods for data collection

PI personally collected new data, audio recordings**,** ethnographic journals, Oral History, and Case Studies.

Program Evaluations

Interviews or Focus Group Sessions

Ethnographic Observations

The procedures for collecting information will follow the conventional methods of social sciences, sociology, and ethnography, particularly those of the three primary sources: closed and semi-open questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participant observation of behaviors and performances in a series of activities, etc. (Paugam, 2010).

Methods for data analysis

Each interrogation action will be answered empirically, always looking in the exploratory part for an explanation that can refine the instruments to which this exploration finds and seeks to respond: refining, from the democratic criterion, the pedagogical methods and practices from the sociological perspective for students from poverty contexts.

The collected information analysis method from reflective sociology links empirical reality and social theory (Bourdieu et al., 1991). In the case of this thesis, the conceptual apparatus is social criticism, specifically, the confrontation of the facts with the field theory of Lewin, Habitus de Bourdieu, and Freire's social learning.: knowledge, doing, communication, and reflexivity (Luttrell, 2010).

Limitations

Neighborhood council members, community members, non-council members, and men and women 18 years and older. Particular attention was paid to integrating the most significant possible participation of traditional socially marginalized populations in decision-making: women, young adults (over 18 years old), and immigrants. However, for many social situations structured by the dominant Dominican culture, women usually had many more domestic responsibilities than men, so they disposed of much less time than men to be involved in a program like the one proposed here. Only one of every four participants was a woman. Persons under 18 are excluded due to the legal age and considerations of legal consent. Just one immigrant was involved a couple of times in the workshops. Despite this insufficient presence of minorities, the researcher benefited from people with varied experiences in terms of age, as both the older and younger generations can learn from each other. Including community members who are not council members may diversify the group, generate a more significant impact through workshops, and motivate future members to be part of the council. All this plurality contributes significantly to the workshop discussions and reflections.

Inclusion Criteria

The existing neighborhood council contacted participants directly and invited other interested community members through word of mouth. Upon receiving the initial recruitment base, the neighborhood council organized informational sessions in which participants who expressed initial interest were informed about the research details (topic, time, purpose). These sessions occurred in the local church, where the council conducts regularly scheduled meetings.

Location: Iglesia Adventista Luz de Bella Vista (Santo et al.) Setting: Meeting room inside the church, Mondays, 7-8:30 pm. Timing of data collection.

Chapter 4: “Now, who are your people?”

The recruitment process as an inquiry

A researcher-educator takes too much risk by simply arriving at the fieldwork and beginning his original design without sufficient knowledge of the population with which he will conduct research. Sociology has warned how all types of unconscious prejudices, inadvertent precisions, unknown dynamics, subjectivities, and unexplored capacities in social agents, social conditions foreign to his, are part of the risks of biases that research-educator (and his experimental project) can fall into (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1966; Accardo, 2001; Javeau, 2003; Mauger, 2013). It is necessary, then, to consider a due epistemological framework (in this case, from the social sciences, specifically from sociology) to bring the knowledge from the field to the greatest possible precision to update the original design of the educative project. As Ella Baker stated: No, Who are your people? Community organizers must first try to understand who their public is, what they want, where they come from, etc.

The information, mainly sociological at this first stage of this action research, was expected to explore, confirm, or readjust the initial educational strategy according to the social and cultural conditions found in the fieldwork in the barrio of El Progreso. Also, within the process of getting to know the community, the future partners of the project and the participants get to know me and become familiar with me, the project, and its intentions for the community. A three-stakeholder recruitment process (the project, the participants, and myself) took place, informing and motivating each party.

In the case that concerns us in this action-research project, there needed to be more information about the social reality of El Progreso and even less about the cultural dynamics of its inhabitants. At most, institutions such as SIUBEN, the national agency in charge of collecting and organizing official information on poverty, provide general demographic indicators for many communities similar to El Progreso (number of inhabitants, composition of the community by housing, gender, age groups, etc.), and some about the economic conditions of the community's inhabitants and some of their material living conditions (employment, type of house, access to services such as drinking water, toilets, etc.).

However, there was no specific existing data and analysis for the community of El Progreso, and to my awareness, there was no previous study from which one could start to understand the community and its inhabitants, the quality of their coexistence, the performance of the of Neighborhood Council, the interest and knowledge of its members about public affairs and fundamental concepts such as local democracy or democratic leadership[6].

For me, as a researcher who acts as an ethnographer, and here fundamentally as a reflective educator or sociologically informed educator (very close in this sense to a social worker), it was essential to constitute an information platform with which to know the neighborhood and its people

[6] One of the significant problems that academic exercises usually encounter in countries like the Dominican Republic, especially at the social sciences level, is the bit reliable or lack of information one has when addressing certain subjects or particular fieldwork. Little or no background in knowledge is usually one of the most common shortcomings that one comes across, forcing one to construct, almost from ground zero, his observations and analysis of the populations to be studied. In this research, SIUBEN officials acknowledged needing more information to know the community better (mainly in its dynamics and logic) beyond basic demographic information and social indicators.

and thus consider the viability of the original educational proposal in the face of the participating population and its interests.

The objective was to be able to fine-tune the thesis as closely as possible to the actual needs, interests, and dispositions of the participating social agents and introduce the most pertinent changes according to what could be found in the fieldwork process. This task would inform a plan of pedagogical rationality (Bourdieu, 1966), where, based on a set of possibilities (made from a tradeoff of cultural assets and social needs), choose an optimum of those cultural resources -be they intellectual, attitudinal, social, or psycho-affective- present in the actors and in their community, which could contribute, in a minimal time (the limited by the project itself), to reintroduce hope (of fostering local social organization and democracy) into reality through events and ideas. This, in the project's original design, was supposed to be collected from a first phase conceived as pre-assessment, in which I would be, above all, an educator preparing his class.

According to this methodology script (see Chapter 3), several activities were carried out with the participants, preliminary to the workshops, with the objective also of gaining the community's trust through the people participating in the recruitment process. Some individually and others collectively, these actions were means to get closer and learn about their social contexts and dynamics, their life stories, their cultural, social, and economic capitals, their visions of the community and their perspectives on its problems, as well as their opinions about the spirit of coexistence of their neighbors, or concepts such as dignity and social justice, among others.

During the entire process, we were able to reconstitute, first of all, the capacities of each participant in the community, particularly with the possible work with the Neighborhood Council. These exercises, both the meetings and the series of interviews[7], also allowed us to develop a

[7] In total, in this first stage, three meetings were held with those interested, which were convened by leading figures from the Neighborhood Council and the Adventist Church, as well as various contacts, including the completion of a

collective portrait of the history of the neighborhood, where the different answers to each of the questions that I was asking in semi-structured questionnaires suggested elements that were brought together in a complementary way until projecting a general collective kind of spoken social portrait of the neighborhood. Even as expected in any research process, unforeseen situations arose within the interviews that provided additional information about El Progreso, its inhabitants, and possibilities within the project itself.

From the beginning of this preliminary phase, I soon realized that these exercises would also serve as the foundation of the participatory process, especially regarding the levels of *illusio*, which is the degree of motivation and involvement (Bourdieu, 1994) a social agent has in a given project. In this case, the interest in public affairs and community affairs of those invited to participate in the project.

A series of meetings and actions were carried out, and on each occasion, I found situations where I got to know the participants, who got to know me and the project. Personal contact was crucial. It was vital for their presence and quality of commitment to the subsequent process. In short, from the first phase, fundamental learning outcomes were achieved, both for the educator-sociologist (get to know the participants and their community) and for the participants themselves (call to see the program and get enthusiastic about it) that went in the same direction and strengthened each other.

It is important to remember that, with this initial phase conceived as preliminary to the workshops, I was not seeking to replicate a sociological study. They were ethnographic

census of the El Progreso, carried out by an official agency. Only the third meeting involved an audiovisual recording. In the days before the workshops, 14 pre-assessment interviews were carried out. Two of the interviewees did not participate in the project. Several of those who participated in the project or were present in at least one or two workshops did not participate in the interviews because they had joined the project on the same day of the workshop (or the second) or did not have the time to do the interviews. Each interview was recorded on audio and video. Then, transcription was made. The interviews varied in length but were regularly between 15 and 25 minutes each. Transcripts were made of both the recorded meeting and the interviews, which are in my files.

observations and interviews of an educator who sought, above all, to specify the elements from the findings that were in the specific interest of the project and that were likely to modify its original pedagogical design. In particular, I conceived the structuring of the pedagogical space of the workshops as a field of actions, where the performances of actors were a function of, according to Lewin's field theory (1951), the specific properties required by the field and the endowment of those properties in possession by the agents participating in it (Bourdieu, 2023).

Here, as depicted in the literature review and the methodology (chapters 2 and 3, respectively), I seek to adapt this theory to place not the participant as a subject dependent on the field, as occurs in real life (fields usually structured first the subject), but the project -acting as a field or social life space- to be at the educational service of the participant in its various conditions. In other words, with the data received in this first stage, I seek to transform the workshops into a social learning field, sensitive to the historical properties of the participants (and not an authoritarian one, imposing rules and dynamics from above) in such a way as to make the field's performance a collective expression of the group, as a natively-structured council of neighborhoods.

Again, this phase of the process belonged to the preparation phase. Still, in reality, due to how the process was developed, and without foreseeing it, the pre-assessment phase became a wide-ranging first and unintended workshop, in which all the actors involved became apprentices of a process feeding knowledge, hope, and participant attitude towards the project. An exciting process of generation of expectations began at this stage.

This chapter depicts these findings in the chronological way in which the events occurred: from my arrival to the community and the means used to enter it, as well as the history of the neighborhood, the development and evolution of the first meetings with the future participants and

finally the interviews, and the collective portrait at the end I was able to establish of them. The goal was to institute a reasoned cartography of actors according to their characteristics and, with that information in hand, make located adjustments for the future workshop stage.

Brief Introduction to the Neighborhood

Since data about the community was minimal, the common knowledge held by the researcher I was could yield any bias, such as class ethnocentrism, which could harm any sound analysis of the neighborhood. El Progreso, as it would be seen, is a very sui generis place compared to the typical popular neighborhood in the Dominican Republic. It was, indeed, imperative to begin the fieldwork with a better understanding of the history of the future participants, their culture, and their social reality, and thus understand their dispositions and indispositions to adjust the objectives as best as possible to the project with the designed means and available resources. The exercise sought, above all, to be exploratory like any regime of the action-research model. In the interest of time, every event was considered valuable to inform the next stage.

Establishing the historicity of the neighborhood and its subjects was essential to understanding the needs, available resources, deficits, and potentials of the future participants of the project. A sociologically reasoned inventory of assets and liabilities was essential to understand better the demand and its provisions for an adequate pedagogical offer. From the first steps, it was evident that one of the most significant difficulties along the way would be the recruitment process: motivating and convincing people to participate in the project would be less straightforward than previously considered, for which I had to devise strategies along the way.

The PI Arrival to the Neighborhood

I reached El Progreso, hand in hand with José and Fidias, figures of legitimacy in town. These two people were fundamental to introducing me to the heart of the community. The first is a resident of more than 30 years in the community, a Member of the Neighborhood Council since its foundation in 1993, and its president for several periods. He is active in a political party and has extensive experience in terms of community leadership. Throughout the project, as seen in detail later, José displayed a remarkable ability to convene with his peers, especially in this first stage, where the Neighborhood Council members did not know about the project, and I had limited knowledge about the community. José's remarkable aptitude for serving the community from the first meeting could be appreciated. Throughout my stay in the sector, he was the engine and spark plug of the Neighborhood Council.

The second fundamental person was Fidias, an Engineer who works with the community, although he does not reside there. His service in El Progreso is essentially based on his work from the social activities at the Adventist Church, with a twice-a-week physical presence in the community since 2002. Fidias has participated in different community programs of the Church for two decades, including Los Conquistadores, a kind of Boy Scouts corps, thanks to which he has been able to come into contact and establish friendships with many young people from the community who are now adults. His legitimacy in the place is recognized as a trusted figure who helps solve community problems when they arise.

Both figures were capital in approaching the neighborhood and the participants. Thanks to their prestige among their peers, this thesis could be carried out and, above all, have a starting point. They were vital to entering the community.

From El Semillero to El Progreso: Origins of the Neighborhood

El Progreso has a fundamental and odd characteristic that can better explain its origin and evolution. The neighborhood has a territorial area of approximately 1.5 square kilometers. It is located within a middle-class and upper-middle-class urbanization (the Bella Vista sector in the Santo Domingo National District, the capital of the Dominican Republic). In the Dominican Republic, this social phenomenon is called "pockets of poverty" because it is located not within marginalized areas but in centric areas with great economic affluence.

The city of Santo Domingo has proliferated since the 1960s and, above all, since the 1970s (Cela, 2020). Many of these urbanizations, built for the emerging middle class of those years, were built with workers from rural communities who arrived and stayed in improvised settlements on wasteland around these new real estate projects.

Fidias explains how a community socioeconomically different from its surroundings came to be established in that space:

> "…the community of El Progreso was forged by a group of people who arrived there 40 years ago; according to what I have interviewed some of them, I have talked, and they are people of whom many of them worked in the area of development construction what is around the Bella Vista sector."

The Social Evolution of the Neighborhood

The first settlers of El Progreso took possession of the place, wasting land at the time, and since then, their properties have yet to have official property titles. Their houses, today in many cases apartments, were built on land that still legally belongs to the state. In other words, they were constructed without property titles or proper permits from the competent local and national authorities for land use and construction purposes. This critical element reveals the contrasting situations of marginality where the community and its inhabitants currently find themselves, as it would be seen later.

Another moving element the community has in terms of property is how the original owners mainly emigrated to the United States. Today, thanks to the new monetary capacities they acquired thanks to their migrant economic conditions, they introduced improvements in the structures of their old houses (and even built horizontal and vertical annexes, which means that there are buildings of up to five floors in the small community of El Progreso). This is how José describes it (he as J, me as JMP):

> **J:** As I say, because the vast majority here are tenants because the homeowners live abroad, there are just very few who live here, so they have progressed, they have left, and here we are all tenants, so they have changed. Before, they were […] vulnerable, but their economic situation has changed.
>
> **JMP:** When you mean vulnerable, what do you mean?
>
> **J:** They were like poorer.
>
> **JMP:** And then they rebuilt their houses and then…
>
> **J:** Many people left

JMP: They are gone.

J: And they have progressed…

JMP: Okay. Who are the owners of the houses that the inhabitants of El Progress rent today?

J: They live abroad, most of them, yes, in the United States [for example]. The owner [points out his hand to a house] has already died. Some children are left, but there are others. The owner of that one is in New York.

JMP: Ok, most of the homes.

J: That one there lives in New York; the owners of those other buildings live in Puerto Rico, so those are people one knows.

JMP: Ok. Furthermore, they used to live here; were they residents?

J: Yes, they were residents.

JMP: Then they migrated somewhere…

J: They are doing better because they rent those houses here now.

When asked how the community has evolved, many interviewees specified that the most significant change occurred in the material of the buildings, from "wooden houses and zinc roofs" to buildings made of rod and cement, in some cases several stories high. Today, those buildings are also rented. As official statistics compiled by SIUBEN later confirmed, the vast majority of residents of El Progreso are tenants, including many of the members of the Neighborhood Council.

This condition of tenants is an important one when thinking about the community bond of its inhabitants and evaluating how the participants in the project, despite not having properties in the town, manage to contribute to the common good of a neighborhood that they make theirs, even without having any real estate property there.

Fidias summarizes the evolution:

> "There are people who work in jobs located close to the area. These people populated the place; when they started families, they started having children. Moreover, those children then, once grown, occupied another house, and there are around some that have been identified between 14 or 16 families that are like clans that have several houses, several of them live where they settled there. However, over time, with the commercial development of the environment, people who are not the original residents of the place have arrived and rented homes or a room within that place at a lower price than those who rent just outside of El Progreso. And then, so close to 27 de Febrero Avenue, they are close to Bella Vista Mall, so close to Plaza Lama, they are close to several shops, and we live where there are many commercial businesses. I define it as good people, hard-working people, and, of course, with common problems like many other communities from the Dominican Republic."

<u>The social consequences of overcrowding</u>

The spatial elements of the neighborhood are one of the most characteristic points of El Progreso and other similar areas in Santo Domingo. Its streets are narrow corridors, with the

leading interior public road at most 4 meters wide. Neighbors are usually separated by just streets or corridors measuring a meter or two. El Progreso has three entrances/exits: to the West, through a relatively narrow street (about four meters wide), and to the North and South, through two corridors, the first one meter wide and the access two meters wide for the second.

Overcrowding is a shrinking of the living space, like a press that pushes and presses the inhabitants of El Progreso from south to north and from east to west, a visual figure that serves as a metaphor with double meaning. On the one hand, overcrowding generates a human situation of chronic coexistence. The shrinking of living space, as expressed by several of the participants in their interviews, is one of the sources of most significant concern for the Neighborhood Council due to how this proximity between some neighbors and others necessarily generates conflicts of all kinds: from loud music to the use of some public spaces. With the arrival of immigrants of Haitian origin, and more recently Venezuelans, whose material conditions and legal statuses increase the need for more people to live under the same roof, the community has increased its population density.

At the same time, as a possible source of conflict between neighbors, overcrowding forces locals to have a more constant exchange when passing each other on the streets in daily, frequent, and close encounters. Paradoxically, this can favor the social cohesion of its inhabitants by strengthening solidarity among residents, and even the unity of criteria for specific organized actions: from the grocery attendant (few small grocery stores are installed in the community) which can establish a *fiao* system[8] , to the exchange of favors that range from taking care of children to cooking food for each other among neighbors, or even, as we saw in this stage of the research,

[8] Small credits for consumption in grocery stores that are paid at the end of the month.

simply producing community from the accompaniment they give to each other at various points on the public roads of El Progreso where the elderly sit to share drinks, games of dominoes, or simply the young people chatting in the roundabout, a kind of actual agora or public square located right in the center of the town that serves at the same time as a parking lot, a basketball court and a meeting point for community activities such as the public health or social assistance campaigns, as one I witnessed, by State institutions, or the open meetings called by the Neighborhood Council.

The Possibilities of a Pragmatic Local Democracy

The topology of the place strongly structures the neighborhood dynamic of El Progreso. Any project conceived to improve its citizens' lives must recognize how its type of vicinity functions, sometimes even against the dominant culture. Beyond policies and issues that are partisan or foreign to the community, the neighborhood space in general, and especially that of El Progreso, produces a common sense for living embedded in the specific needs and physical characteristics of the neighborhood in which electricity power outages, crimes, the smell of a sewer become a common issue and a priority or an urgency thing to be solved. If a problem arises in El Progreso, that problem is likely to affect, in one way or another, a majority, if not everyone in the community, precisely because it occurs in such a small space that it is difficult for it not to affect at least a good part of the community. This perspective was omnipresent in the pre-assessment interviews and the different conversations held with the participants. For example, the lack of space here evocates Ricardo, a lawyer and member of the Neighborhood Council, is a problem for everyone in El Progreso. He stated that it is hard to escape or ignore anything happening in the quarter in these conditions.

This situation brought up an interesting point since the first conversations with people at El Progreso. Usually, the public policies that regularly impact this neighborhood are mainstream national politics: police securing private property and "operativos medicos" (occasional healthcare campaigns) when there is an outburst of viral or epidemic wave. In general, state action in El Progreso remains within national politics, not local, which is mainly ideated by the Dominican ruling class who do not have enough knowledge about the community in which the policy will be implemented or are not aligned with the real priorities that affect the living conditions of people in El Progreso. These matters frequently result in unfitting policies to most of the needs of the barrio because when they are applied, they do not take into account the public's perspective, usually resulting in misunderstanding of issues and/or, worst, erratic or unsustainable solutions since they typically do not integrate people as part of the solution.

After observing the history of state intervention in El Progreso versus what have been initiatives of the Neighborhood Council, one could say vicinity politics represent an opportunity and a legitimate substitute for traditional politics: it challenges what custom of partisan politics (directed from above with an impact on the reality of those below), establishing an alternative praxis of politics guided by the logic of the neighborhood, where reality itself generates a common sense which selects the real needs over accessorial matters, in terms of what requires to be done and with what urgency is. Not that rivalry among neighborhood clans or private interests cannot be present or arise (I witnessed few). Still, genuine general interest and the common good are usually more likely and closer to prevailing with vicinity politics than partisan politics.

For example, in the Dominican Republic, there has historically been a strong presence of anti-Haitian prejudice among the general population, mainly through racist governing ideologies

and public policies that have been spread for decades by the Dominican ruling elites. In all the days I spent with locals, no negative allusion was heard from any of the future participants, neither in the workshops nor in the interviews, about the strong presence of Haitian national immigrants in their community. On the contrary, expressions of solidarity and understanding were heard, and even praise was given for the exemplary behavior of the community of Haitian migrants in El Progreso, with whom Dominicans share space, lives, and tribulations.

This may be an insight into how reality instructs its pragmatic logic and views on people over import and fallacious ideology. An opportunity for practical reasoning to reconstruct the truth from the experience of harmonious and pacific coexistence between Dominicans and Haitians in the same town as El Progreso.

The Neighborhood Council as a Democratic Possibility

The first days and weeks in El Progreso taught me essential lessons not necessarily included in the original plan. As a sociologically trained observer, I took notes from my experiences, encounters, and conversations. I put into dialogue the three backgrounds I carried out and mentioned in this thesis, accompanying them with pragmatist views: the social scientist-based European approach, the educational empiricist Deweyan and Freirean perspective, and the grounded Dominican reality of the place. Exposing the whole thesis to this last point served as part of its verification, as pragmatist William James (1903) stated, the validation of truth based on its verification through and through events.

The Neighborhood Council is an entity in the Dominican Republic that continues to exist not because locally instituted democracy works but because people have many lives under difficult conditions and need to be organized to face the difficulties in their daily lives. Public institutions usually wait to hear their voices. Neighborhood Councils are recognized by the state (mainly by local governments) as a kind of NGO. However, it does not have much real institutional power (no budget, no institutional role as a decision maker or even as an adviser of local authorities), mainly because a grassroots logic of local democracy may take significant stakes from the ones today controlled monopolistically by partisan politics and the ruling class. Here, a few observations I sought about the possibilities the idea of congregation could contribute to next steps of the project.

Freire said that people liberate themselves together (1970). Still, you first have to find a common faith, as Dewey believed (1934), an initial point of hope as a communal mechanism for mobilizing a community from a stage of inertia. In the spaces of poverty that I was able to verify, many people tend to resign themselves to the problems and situations, being, for many times, citizens deprived of rights who have been historically accustomed to living second-class, marginalized citizenship. In the Dominican Republic, where universal social, cultural, political, and economic rights become privileges for the few, the humblest tend to trust and leave their reality in the hands of an omnipotent being as an existential remedy for their misfortunes. “Let it be what God wants,” “God is the one who knows,” and “In Christ who can do everything” are part of the expressions very often heard among Dominicans in general and, of course, from the people from El Progreso.

These phrases are part of the daily religious components accompanying unprivileged Dominicans, where social uncertainty and vulnerability are significant. The lack of actions and the long-lasting miserable conditions of their living have brought much resignation (a kind of

defection type of attitude, if one takes Hirschman 1970 categories) and translate into silence or conformity when any punctual help or alleviation of a problem is obtained. For example, the case of one of the interviewees, Miledys, who, when asked about the evolution of the neighborhood, cites that the water problem has already been solved because "there is already water 5 days a week."

Although in life spaces like El Progreso, social performance is usually measured to spoken word enunciation, the ethos, usually subaltern, due to their social history, tends to be silent, timid, passive in front of dominant social figures, and also tends to be resigned to the reality in which it has lived its entire life, seeing most of the time very little hope for changes. In a country like the Dominican Republic, with a deficient system of social institutions taking care of people's lives, not having a godfather or "enclave" who has enough social capital or prestige to get you out of trouble when you are a just a powerless citizen, socially anonymous, can leave you even more unprotected from any arbitrariness or authoritarianism coming from power or just from the harshness typically of impoverished social contexts.

In El Progreso, I encountered a similar state of affairs, where a long-lasting condition of defection from public affairs has been generated by a long-term kind of vicious circle of the sentiment of "abandonment from the State to our luck." This reality is reproduced from generation to generation, and where, usually, only a stroke of luck (lottery or the bid for a baseball player career or a connection with some politicians) can break the usual social destiny marked when your background comes from a context of poverty[9], as it is for the majority of people living in El

[9] In the Dominican Republic there are more lottery stores than primary and high school classroom. The economist Thorstein Veblen, in his classic The Theory of Leisure Class (1899), link gambling to the lack of rational ways where to build a decent life. Very close to what it seems be the cause of why there are so much gambling in the DR. Both inside and just outside, in the southern exit of El Progreso, there are two stores for gambling

Progreso. Here, as anthropology has stated (Mauss, 1909; Durkheim, 1912), a gathering is fundamental for any community to re-launch hope in better days through its organization.

Many conversations and interviews were crucial for me to understand that a specific community of criteria exists among the participant's visions and hopes. Their definitions of life, their community, and local democracy, among others, were similar or at least close enough for all of them. That shared knowledge or faith, coming from a shared path of everyday experiences and biographical patterns, was spread among the interviewees in the form of individual experiences and sometimes did not even flourish consciously in the individual himself. A confident public factor has to emerge to connect and make visible all these elements that I found that the future participants have in common. Their presence, gathered in an assembly, could become a powerful pedagogical act for reconstructing hope.

Building a common faith requires a sense of community first because challenging a given reality, such as social inertia, implies a daring step for many, and it is better to do it along with others. Therefore, preparing a common faith and voice, not only of each person but also the one that is usually strongest, the cooperative one, is the basis for any action toward community organization. Hence, preparing the emergence of that voice as a process of reflecting, collecting, and organizing its expression was subsequently assumed to be one of the central pedagogical objectives of the project.

What came from the three recruitment meetings plus the interviews was precisely to call the project "an opportunity," as some did, for the Neighborhood Council to take a critical and necessary break from their routine of more than 30 years, where they only had time to decide emergency actions in specific situations (some chronic, others very circumstantial), or for the often-irregular election periods of new directives.

However, there needed to be more time to consider what was being done. Additionally, the project was coming from a third party, a neutral character, without any suspicion of being motivated by particular power interests among them. An official of the Adventist Church expressed it this way: “It is a real opportunity for the Neighborhood Council, first to get together not to solve something in particular, but to think about how to do things in a better way. I believe this project, especially its educational dimension, can relaunch the interest and motivation of its members and others whom the proposal may attract."

If, from an etymological point of view, education means taking your interior jewels and making them worldly (the reflexive and creative extroversion of private feelings, silent experiences, un-acknowledge internalized knowledge, etc.), then an educator must prepare the adequate social, psycho-affective and intellectual conditions of possibilities for the participants for the democratic dynamic that could lead towards that direction. This element was confirmed in this preliminary phase.

The idea was to promote and encourage the production and use of knowledge among participants to relaunch interest in thinking and organizing the community within an atmosphere of enthusiasm and confidence that visualized the different possibilities for accessible improvement that could be made in the community. The point was to sustain hope with the prospect of personal and communal enhancements. One of the first effects of social vulnerability is that it affects people's hope for a better future, thus affecting motivation. They feel “unprotected, vulnerable,” the terms the participants used. Building a window of hope became the short-term strategy to be implemented; opening that window became a middle-term goal. Convincing people to participate in a project was our primary objective right there. With this situation, the concept of *illusio* of the

participants, that degree of belief of a social agent in investing himself in a given process or project, became one of the main concerns for me at this point.

The Recruitment Process

The process of recruiting participants is worth discussing because of everything it began to tell and depict regarding some unexpected situations that arose throughout the project. For each exercise, I filled out an ethnographic diary indicating how the potential participants' social vulnerability could impact the project's vulnerability. I lived “with my heart in my mouth,” as is popularly said in the Dominican Republic, often doubting if the project could or could not come to a reasonable conclusion, and on occasions, I questioned the viability of its beginning.

The program's original design was aimed at about 25 people, but that group was never reached. Despite having the support and accompaniment of the local Adventist Church's leadership (its minister, a supervisor, and, above all, the leadership of Fidias over the community members), it was evident that I would soon encounter the primary challenging condition for the project: the fragility of the participants’ social conditions and, consequently, the difficulties that could arise when trying to convince people to participate in the program.

This situation essentially responds to two factors that I was able to establish: (1) the participants’ living conditions starting with their status as tenants who materially tend to make a living from a job that, in the best of cases, when it is a formal one, is a low position in the labor hierarchy or some highly volatile public position. In other cases, they work independently in exhausting activities due to the long days and types of work they do. They have their time taken,

fundamentally, by the search for survival. For example, to coordinate the interviews, a suitable date had to be negotiated several times with most of them, often carrying out the interviews on weekends, Saturdays, or Friday afternoons precisely due to the unavailability of time that many expressed during the week. However, even on weekends, the fatigue was such that six out of the twelve people requested to do the interviews told us how their Sunday routines were reserved for rest, household chores (including caring for dependent people at home), or having fun. That was respected, and it made me aware of how difficult the situation was for them and their participation in the project.

There is no easy situation in a working-class context. One of the questions that the interviewees answered almost unanimously was how they define their community. In addition to saying that it was a "quiet community" (although there were some problems of coexistence, which would later be work material in the workshops), they also referred to the fact that it was a neighborhood of hard-working people (they used that same adjective). Without any doubt, El Progreso is a working-class neighborhood, but the precise term they used to define it, "laboriosa" (laborious), implies, in the Dominican context, people who not only belong to the working class but who make work their livelihood, not only material but also social dignity. For the participants, work means a point of honor before the community, as Anthropology would suggest (Pitt-Rivers, 2005). Work is a prestigious way to earn a living. It is one of those bunkers in which usually people living in contexts of poverty take a symbolical refuge to compensate for some of the stigmas that frequently their conditions suffer (Bourdieu, 1997), hence the phrase "poor but honest," from which the worker symbolically projects his dignity into the social jury.

It is complicated for these inhabitants to be able, in addition to managing their lives and those of their dependents in conditions of poverty, to have the desire to dedicate time to a project that in some way breaks with their leisure habits as buffers of existence. Other experiences in other times and latitudes have shown the same kind of social state of lethargy in people (Lazarfeld, 1971; Patterson, 1982). Additionally, it is not within the traditions of the Dominican Republic, the culture, or the social organization, especially in the most vulnerable strata. This last element is the meeting point between social and political marginality from which these neighborhoods usually suffer.

More reliable data must be collected on the accumulated defection levels or disinterest in Dominican neighborhoods' public affairs. Although people continue to vote in elections, only a minority are active in political parties. Voting could find an explanation in that electoral campaigns are a particular time in which people take each other into account and get entertained. In many ways, voting in popular neighborhoods does not necessarily mean having an interest in public affairs. It is simply a method of survival, either because the state continues to be the principal employer and distributor of resources, and being close to it, more than an action of conviction, is an exercise of interest and survival, or because politics serves to “botar el golpe” (deflect the blow), that is, as a mechanism to evacuate the psychic pressure, which from the unconscious is experienced within the thousand and one hidden forces with which poverty impacts the human body (Dejours, 2002).

The First Meeting

Although some of the participants in the project had strong ties with the Neighborhood Council or were involved in other aspects of community service (the church itself, for example), the first gathering was complex. Fidias and then José, President of the Neighborhood Council, contributed to calling each one of the board members in the first place (about 19 people). However, only 12 people attended the first meeting. At the beginning, José complained to the rest of his colleagues, either because those summoned were absent or because they arrived late, and that gave us our first warning. “You invite them. You call them several times. You talked to them on the phone. Still, this afternoon, I took care of calling one by one, and look, look, they are not here,” pointed José. And then, said to me: “It is not easy to mobilize them. Indeed, they usually have many occupations, but there are also many disinterests and a lack of commitment, discipline, and responsibility. It is a permanent issue that we have here in the Neighborhood Council. It is what I spend the most time on, trying to get my colleagues present for the activities," José deplored while we waited outside the church, which would be the place where all the activities would take place.

The meeting began with a religious prayer performed by Fidias. The spiritual element seemed very important among participants and the general population, especially in the material context of deprivation, where any stop or pause that can symbolize a better future can represent a substantive relief within the chronic calamity of many. Prayer is a social performative act that gives a sense of faith and optimism to any group action in the Dominican social and cultural context of poverty. In this case, Fidias prayed for the prospect the project could bring to the community and the participants, including me. This fact touched me deeply as a human being and strengthened my commitment significantly. The project there got to a higher stage, and people

assumed it very seriously. Seeing people bow their heads and ask for a project for which someone is responsible made a considerable impression on my social conscience as an educator.

Then, Fidias introduced me and my academic credentials, and I, in turn, presented the project in general terms. I took about 30 minutes to make a presentation about the objectives and characteristics of the project. The reasons for the project were presented, the details of its contents, methodology, the calendar and time that each one of the workshops would involve, and the topics and dynamics that would be discussed in each session. Notably, the participation of Yanio, former President of the Neighborhood Council, a public official working on a social assistance program for neighborhoods, was decisive. In two of the speaking turns that he took, Yanio valued the need for a capacity-building program for the Neighborhood Council, expressing the hope that such a program could bring for the entire community, serving as an "engine" to organize and energize the functions and actions of the El Progreso's Neighborhood Council. José, the council's President, was also very passionate about the possibilities the program would bring to the community. Other participants pointed out the visibility that such a program could bring to public authorities, starting with participation in the SIUBEN, the state agency (that the Neighborhood Council contacted unsuccessfully before) in charge of collecting information on poverty in the neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic, and redirecting it to the different institutions in charge of redistributing public resources through care and social assistance services.

The Gap Between the State and the Community

Because the second workshop to be executed consisted of a session dedicated to getting the group of participants in touch with the available data about the community and discussing it, I

thought about one state agency that could do it. At that time, the data about El Progreso did not exist as such, and the previous surveys that had been done were very limited (there was barely an idea of the number of people who lived there). I contacted Servicio Único de Beneficiarios (SIUBEN), a public office attached to the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development of the Dominican Republic, in charge of collecting, analyzing, and formulating demographic censuses and economic data of the impoverished communities of the Dominican Republic. SIUBEN agreed to conduct a census of El Progreso and deliver the information to us in time for the second workshop. Although the project initially planned to carry out the research just after the first workshop, due to time constraints, we did it between the second information and recruitment meeting and the third one, allowing the state institution to collect the information, process it, and provide it to me, to be able to strengthen the last recruitment meeting before the workshops, by showing some insights about SIUBEN findings.

To prepare for the SIUBEN census, a second recruitment meeting was held to establish a coordination working session where the Neighborhood Council and SIUBEN exchange information. The first meeting provided information about the community, and the second was about the census. About seven people from the Neighborhood Council attended. They listened to me talk about the project and the importance of the SIUBEN census. I then introduced a SIUBEN official who explained the survey's technical elements.

It was a moment in which the future participants of the project once again expressed new hopes with the participation of SIUBEN in the project, which people usually associate with social aid. On this occasion, SIUBEN was perceived as more of a technical agency than a source of aid distribution for the community. This marked a change from the traditional view within the Neighborhood Council. The people who participated in the meeting that day came out with a

strengthened faith in a new stage for the Neighborhood Council. “Now I understand what this project is all about!” said Ricardo, one of the participants, at the end of the meeting.

A SIUBEN technical team first reconnoitered the place to prepare and organize the census. Due to El Progreso's rugged topology, I proposed that José and four members of the Neighborhood Council serve as the local guides. One SIUBEN official said that the survey is usually carried out by SIUBEN either independently or with little guidance from the locals. This time, things were different.

As the SIUBEN census made clear, any initiative that implies active participation from the people is already a plus in a community like El Progreso. At this level, it was about more than just information and recruitment. These learning outcomes also contributed to the idea that the program had already begun, although the workshops had yet to start.

As they oriented the SIUBEN preliminary team to determine an approximate mapping of the corridors and narrow streets, the Neighborhood Council directors toured around El Progresso, greeting and calling the residents by their names. This action reinforced their leadership over their neighbors. When they passed the houses, the inhabitants of El Progreso saw the SIUBEN action as a joint task of the Neighborhood Council, under its responsibility. This not only immensely helped SIUBEN, helping them identify elements they would have needed help to identify, but it also strengthened the Neighborhood Council image and the prestige of the council directors. They assumed a role in which they were experienced connoisseurs, as they are, but were never told or allowed to display that experience and knowledge. At the same time, their commitment to the program grew more substantial with this action. Much camaraderie was felt among them, and I

gained more legitimacy that day among the members of the Neighborhood Council and with SIUBEN, as they expressed to me later.

A second element arose during the Neighborhood Council and the SIUBEN meeting. At a certain point, the state agency established neighborhood boundaries different from the ones the Neighborhood Council had proposed for El Progreso. According to SIUBEN, some apartment buildings surrounding the El Progreso block should also be included. The entrances and exits of these buildings face the outside of the neighborhood, so its inhabitants did not have to enter the neighborhood to enter and leave their homes. The representatives of the Neighborhood Council argued that the people from these buildings never talk to them and do not make part of their community. They argued that due to socioeconomic differences (those residents being middle class and the "real" El Progreso being lower and lower middle class), those residents did not want to see themselves as part of a community of poor people. They stated, "There is no communication between us and them, and it is because of them, not because of us," almost unanimously.

At that moment, I intervened between the two parties, explaining to the SIUBEN officials that, in reality, the members of the Neighborhood Council may have a point given that a community is more than a purely administrative differentiation and that this is a living entity, which, as Renan said of the nation (1882): is a "vouloir vivre ensemble" (a will to live together) in a "plebiscite de tous le jours" (in an everyday plebiscite). I pointed out that if those buildings felt, for reasons of class or even location, far away from or indifferent to the reality of El Progreso, the question of whether they should be included or not should be better discussed. Furthermore, I argued that these inhabitants, as belonging to another social class, would create a bias in the research sample by raising the socioeconomic level in statistics due to the inclusion of a higher socioeconomic status not eligible for public aid, which would distort the reality and classify El

Progreso within a higher category in the official statistics. This would be unfavorable to the social assistance the neighborhood would be entitled to and expecting.

This was an exciting moment because the gaze of the state, in the person of the SIUBEN officials, which at that moment was in contradiction with that of the community, began to listen to the inhabitants of the neighborhood. There, an old vision from above began to be reconstructed or rectified with the people's input and participation. The community dynamics dictated the logic of the conversation in the face of the administrative rationality of the state. This element further empowered the directors of the Neighborhood Council to participate in the operation, performing an actual act of defense of the community in a peaceful dialogue with the state. The SIUBEN officials were also motivated by the community members' commitment to the census they were preparing. As SIUBEN officials told me, this enthusiasm from locals has rarely happened to them. Everyone came out more assertive in their functions than before the exercise.

In a final action related to the participation of SIUBEN in this phase, the state's vision was once again verified by the reality of the community, which usually needs to be consulted (but rarely actually does), bringing with it an important lesson for future census public policies. It turns out that the census-taking operation was carried out three days later on a weekday, and it was unsuccessful. When it was a weekday, most houses remained closed because their inhabitants were working or at school. Although the agency was warned to do it during the weekend, the availability of the SIUBEN teams could only do it for a different day. Of 845 houses established as existing in the neighborhood, only about 350 could be reached (SIUBEN, 2023). This element was a solid part that later served when it was discussed in one of the workshops, the need to know the community in order to establish sound and effective public policies. In sum, with these actions,

the importance and the democratic legitimacy of a well-organized Neighborhood Council were vindicated both technically and politically.

The Third Meeting:

In order to invite other people who had yet to be able to attend the previous meetings for some reason, a third information and recruitment meeting was held. In this, which would be the last, about 15 people attended, including the church minister and his superior in the Church. It was a meeting of approximately 45 minutes in which the basis of the project, its objectives, tasks, and times were presented again. Some of the information that was found by the SIUBEN census was utilized. Several mentions of it were made in order to explain the usefulness of knowledge by the Neighborhood Council. The message was that with the Neighborhood Council's accumulated experience, public policies in the town would have a different quality. This unequivocal and strong statement brought in just one sentence about the project's rationale.

The conclusion of that third meeting was twofold: On the one hand, the importance of the Neighborhood Council was evidenced when I exposed the gap between the knowledge of the SIUBEN implementing its census and how it was necessary to build the official data with the support of the Neighborhood Council; In the same way, a qualitative knowledge, that usually is absent in any public statistics, needs the community knowledge, and there, the Neighborhood Council acts like a public library or an archive about the town, a kind of "collective intellectual" (Bourdieu, 2003) of its history, its sociology, etc. Nowadays, I may call it CI (Communal Intelligence).

On the other hand, this third meeting (a week before the first workshop) completed another critical aspect of building hope to motivate and recruit participants. An expectation was created

among the members of the Neighborhood Council and the nonmember participants. There was a great feeling of eagerness among the participants regarding the project, evidenced by several interventions expressing the “serious” nature of the project, “unprecedented” as expressed by Ricardo, one of the participants, with many years of being a member of the Neighborhood Council and with one of the most committed levels of community work in the entire present group.

Despite these three meetings, with their initial push of hope and faith, I observed that the link with the project could remain fragile. Above all, the capacity of the neighborhood population to provide participants with interest and availability of time was more limited than expected. The presence of half as many people as initially planned made us lower our expectations from 25 to about 15 people. I established that the story would be successful if the program could take place with 12 approximately. The meeting closed with another prayer. Everyone in the place was again touched by the ritual led by Fidias, which put everyone in a very special and real emotional moment. The prayer said:

> “Our Father, who is in heaven, thank you very much for this meeting. We pray that Juan Miguel is successful in this project aimed at the community's well-being. We are very open and positive that it will be successful and that tools and solutions can be found for the dynamics of our community. We also thank you for life, for allowing us to have this meeting today, amen”.

After this deference I received, as an adult educator and a human being, I felt touched by the kindness of people and their responsibility to me. I could not have felt more committed to it.

Along the way, and before formally starting the workshops, we had a week in between. The pre-assessment interviews were coming; I had to tense the motivation muscle. The interviews would also provide unexpected findings about the educational properties of the interviews themselves that will impact research strategies for the workshop rounds.

The Interviews: Moment of Prominence and Distinction for the Participants

Beyond the information about their lives, their visions of their community of El Progreso, the handling of certain concepts of local democracy and social justice, and even their expectations with the project itself, the interviews with the participants yielded more interesting clues than expected.

Each interviewee was present when the interviews were recorded in audiovisuals, including an interviewer, a camera, a hand-held microphone, and a cameraman. Unexpectedly, each interview scene seemed like a kind of television set in which the interviewee was no longer just an isolated opinion; instead, a repositioning of his ordinary social status occurred with his role as an interviewee. The participant's traditional secondary role became the main one. Although in some cases, there may have been some apprehension at the beginning of the interview, there was a case where the father of one of the interviewees intervened friendly and asked not to be recorded. Each of the 12 interviewees carried out the interviews with great ease.

The interviews occur in a double register: the question and the dialogue, which puts interviewees and interviewer on equal terms, gaining esteem and thus subjectivity (Bourdieu, 1997). I explained to the interviewee what the exercise consisted of and for what purposes the interview was being carried out, in addition to thanking him/her for granting the interview and for agreeing to participate in the project.

Most of the interviewees responded with a smile and a nod, as if they were experiencing a great moment, expressed modestly. I felt dignity in them and dignity in the exercise. Taking into account that, in public services, as in life itself, people from humble social strata, like the ones from El Progreso, often suffer mistreatment, including discrimination of all kinds, but essentially social (which they also have, given the social and racial composition in the Dominican Republic, usually also entails a component of racial discrimination). The interview functioned as a refurbishment, or, more, Deweyan, a reconstruction of the value of dignity through the appearance of the people's voice, signifying a kind of restitution of the social importance of his or her opinion and their voices in general. This time, the impression was that interviewees felt their voices were heard and based on the central stage, converting them into social protagonists of knowledge, usually reserved for "experts," as they have seen before on TV. It was a countercultural action to the relegation that social agents from the neighborhood traditionally suffer. From now on, the interviewees' opinions will be considered and can be used to inform other people and serve the project.

The first action that depicted what strengthened the person's self-esteem was when the interviewee was asked to say his or her name. When asked to introduce themselves with their name, age, and job, all interviewees, without exception, pronounced their first names and surnames, a rare usage in Dominican daily life. At that moment, the social agent expressed his identity with pride, as if she or he had just come out of anonymity. Just as is done for significant events or ceremonies, Dominicans take out their best clothes or dishes and cutlery (typical in Dominican culture, especially in the humblest classes of the DR) to attend or present to society with the best version of themselves. Pronouncing their full names and surnames was as if an actor put on his performance, as he or she stands, takes a pose, and seeks to display the best of himself,

adorning his presentation with his social honor´s titles. By not having material resources to show, a compensation mechanism seems to occur in assessing qualities. Hence, perhaps, the social symbolism of the viral expression "poor but honest," the first being quantity and the second being a compensatory quality of more moral weight. The interviews thus become the moment of "lights, camera, and action," turning the interviewees into *authors* of their own stories but also into specialists who are consulted and who will be, from that moment, the main *actors* of a relevant project, which probably felt as it might nurture the social recognition (by a third party) of their social importance. This behavior is seen when Dominicans from similar backgrounds are asked about issues in local and national media.

The opinions of the interviewees, at some point assisted in lexical terms by the interviewer, make the social agent transform his lived experience into spoken word. The interviewer invites him into that dialogue to choose the topic, sometimes the perspective, other times the word or the thought, and hold them in a safe space in communication with the interviewer.

As it was an interview in the form of a conversation, the symbolic violence from interrogative interviews seemed to decrease. However, when asked about his vision of how the neighborhood has evolved, Santos, a lawyer and accountant, was looking for a way to express an idea, but it has yet to come up. I cut down the time of no answer from the interviewee. I reintroduced a topic, suggesting the possibility of an answer (as in an informal conversation) based on past answers from other interviewees. Suddenly, the interviewee pauses, thinks, and nods, and his speech restores its course. This reflective, that is, ethnographic, praxis contributed to the pedagogical objectives of the program.

It is crucial to make the interviewees confident to inform and motivate them to participate. Therefore, it was necessary to demonstrate the democratic accessibility of a program that may

represent certain intellectual apprehensions or barriers to general populations, especially when the facilitator comes from an academic background.

Conducting the interviews as an exercise shared with others in as much of a dialogical way as possible caught the participants' attention and consolidated their motivation for participating in the project. One of the more vital parts of this interview process was that invitees felt they confirmed many attitudes they already have and were led to know others about social reality in general, in co-operation with me, which made them perceive their future possible gain as participants in a genuinely learning program that prove to be accessible, trustworthy, intellectually attractive and eventually and somehow provider of social prestige.

This enthusiasm usually comes from the legitimacy that the project represents to them, not only in terms of the intrinsic and social value they may perceive but also on a personal level. For example, when closing the interviews and asking what the interviewees expected about the project, their answers made explicit their commitment and how their motivations were strengthened. In my ethnographic notes, I pointed out that the interviews, although the last step before the workshop, became the most relevant point in the participant recruitment process.

A collective portrait of the participants for the use of the Educator

Although in the three information and recruitment meetings prior to the start of the workshops, as well as during the census carried out by SIUBEN, I was able to obtain valuable information to establish a panoramic picture of the Neighborhood Council and its practices, it was imperative to know in detail and individually the future participants of the project.

The objective was to understand the participants in terms of their cultural, social, and economic capitals, as well as the general characteristics of their habitus (a set of durable dispositions and skills of a social agent, which were structured by their culture of origin); the degree of their *illusio* (level of belief in the project), among other personal, social and intellectual dimensions toward a project like the one we were about to start. These sociological notions seek to evaluate the participant's quality of knowledge about the workshop topics, certain cultural attitudes, and general social commitments related to the community and local democracy. All to evaluate the participants' possibilities regarding the contents and the learning exercises designed for the workshop.

These conversations represented a significant opportunity to learn about the community's social, historical, and cultural conditions and, at the same time, about the exercise's future ethical and civic nature. The interviews would close the cycle of information collection prior to the workshops. The findings were fascinating, and they reoriented some crucial elements of the original design, confirming others[10].

Unwilling disposition: the conditions of possibility of the project

[10] The community members who were finally able to be and/or subsequently participated in the project only represent part of the variety of people and living conditions in El Progreso. For example, there were only a few immigrants. Three women participated in the workshops, but only one participated in the pre-assessment interviews because two joined the project only in the first workshop. However, without a doubt, they are the actors who, due to their involvement in the Neighborhood Council or community work with the church, represent, both through their experiences and their vocation for service, whether individually or as a collective, the profile of the people likely to be interested in being part of the Neighborhood Council. Again, as was said previously, these interviews did not seek the exhaustiveness or rigor of sociological research. They were conceived so that any educator by profession or in a position of circumstances can use accessible and useful sociological notions, methods, and approaches, thus contributing to a rapprochement between a specific type of educational program supply and its demand, seeking to improve the performance of a democratic pedagogical experience between the facilitator and his or her public.

The first lesson I obtained from the interviews was the need for more time for potential participants to be available for the project. However, time was not the only reluctance among many prospective participants. By talking with them in an informative way before, during, and after each of the three meetings, or by calling them one by one and trying to coordinate with them a good time for the interviews, I was able to confirm the difficulty that it implied, even on weekends, being able to have a meeting with most of them. I also noticed their passivity or skepticism initially regarding the project and their possible involvement.

On the one hand, difficulties are ever-present in ordinary life in conditions of poverty. To cite just a few examples taken from observations and conversations with participants throughout the project: For the working classes, just the act of transportation takes up a large part of their daily schedule (adding in the deficiencies of public transportation and the usual distances between workers' homes and workplaces); vulnerability (for example, Dominican neighborhoods do not have sufficient structures and means in public or private spaces to prevent accidents on public or domestic roads), in the context of poverty (neighborhoods are usually places where the authorities, instead of exercising their protective role, such as public safety, act many times in a repressive manner, as is the case of the frequent arrests of young people by the police to extort them for money, with which the police officers tried to compensate for part of their precarious incomes).

The budget for most of the residents in El Progreso, participants included, is limited to the minimum to survive, leaving people exposed and uncovered to any unforeseen events. Fidias explained that when this happens, and it happens very often, they have to go out and look for borrowed monetary resources from different sources (which are not available, and the environment usually does not have them) in order to be able to solve the situation. In other cases, they must find

a sponsor or personality with enough social prestige to deal with public powers without being exposed to authoritarianism, such as being able to free someone from arbitrary imprisonment.

Additionally, the working class lives in places like El Progreso, where they are more exposed to diseases. One of the interviewees, Ricardo, alludes to the relationship between wastewater and diseases. Therefore, finding care for medications, doctors and hospitals, emergencies, consultations, and waiting lists for operations or treatments is challenging.

The tenant situation of most of the inhabitants of El Progreso and those interviewed as well, later confirmed by the SIUBEN statistics, was already quite an eloquent indicator of the economic vulnerability. They were not mere tenants: they were tenants in a neighborhood that still experiences the precariousness of not having legal security even for the existing properties.

These conditions have existed since the very foundation of the neighborhood, and they extend through the different generations and cohorts of inhabitants of El Progreso, a place of social, political, and economic marginality where State intervention is very deficient.

Of course, these living conditions usually affect its residents' confidence in any invitation to democracy (an idea almost inexistent in their ordinary vocabulary unless some media use it) and in any presented project that seeks to relaunch the community. The specter of hope for better days exists in a community like El Progreso, which is not immune to decades of citizen marginality, material dispossession, and social reproduction.

With these encounters, the research fieldwork suggested modifications to its original design. For example, I felt very uncertain whether those who would be in the pre-assessment interview would be the same ones who would be in the post-assessment interview. I even wondered if they, as a group, could complete an adequate number or if each of them was so assiduous that

they could not complete the presence in the five workshops. This uncertainty caused the measuring and recording of the data collected to vary somewhat, going from an empiricist sociology of the Chicago School style to a reflective anthropology perspective using the paradigm of ethnography applied to the field of education (Jackson, 1993; Wigg-Stevenson, 2014).

The most important thing was to know ethnographically about the participants' culture from which I could experimentally assess the viability of my project design as an educator, according to the participant's dispositions.

The original project calendar was designed to work on each workshop with an interval of 15 days between them. Due to the fragile bond that I noticed among the participants regarding involvement in a project outside their life commitments, the strategy was changed. The workshops would no longer be held every 15 days but every eight days. Mondays were chosen due to the availability of the church's worship hall, which was made available to us and was the only place in the community with enough space to carry out the workshop, with relative acoustic isolation, air conditioning, and institutional legitimacy. It was strategic that the inhabitants did not have to travel outside their home environment, nor were there distractions typical of the noise or other distractions characteristics of El Progreso.

Likewise, one of the Mondays included in the calendar involved a holiday (February 27, the date of the independence of the Dominican Republic), and we collectively preferred to move it to the next day, Tuesday the 28th. I wanted to avoid exposing the project to a long duration, where any unforeseen event could ruin the participation of one or more project members. Although intense, the shorter the project's total time, the better the attendance of most workshop participants or the chances of dropouts or absences from the workshops would be reduced. In pedagogical terms, what could be prevented in an adult population is that the shorter the time, the fewer

distractions or incidents susceptible to interrupt participants' attention, and follow-up could intervene in lives that are usually very vulnerable to them due to their social conditions.

All those interviewees were over 40 years old, and four were in their 60s. One person reached the 4th grade of primary school. In contrast, six people reached some level of high school, and the remaining five had university degrees (an engineer, a specialist in marketing, and three lawyers). They all had families and dependents in their care. The academic degree was accompanied by a weighting of their participation in the Neighborhood Council, in the experience of party politics, or community work (essentially in the social actions of the Community Church). All but two had been living in the area for more than 20 years, and at least six of them were over 40 years old living there, including two of them who were born or arrived in the sector with their families during the first years of their lives.

How do participants view their community?

After the basic information (name, age, time living in El Progreso, academic degree, and job), I discussed their visions for the community with all interviewees. I started with the question about how they would define the community of El Progreso. They all said more or less the same thing: a "laborious," "good," and "calm" community were the most used adjectives, always pointing out that there could be "occasionally" one or another problem. I then asked them how the community had evolved. Almost all of them first argued about the physical change experienced in the neighborhood, going from wooden houses to blockhouses. Some cited how they now had roads that, although still very narrow, "at least were paved." Two deplored the loss of land that was previously common spaces and, little by little, was appropriated by some residents.

Then, it was my turn to discuss the people and their changes. In most cases, I raised that topic (only two people spontaneously commented on it) as if the topic of people, although all-pervading in their realities, was not a first option in their most immediate thoughts when asked about the evolution of the neighborhood. Again, an important subject is relegated to a secondary position. Visible subjects, like the neighborhood's physical evolution, were the first (and sometimes only) things that came to their mind when talking about evolution in their community. Mostly, only after I suggested social issues did, they start thinking and talking briefly about it.

Here, the answers were unanimous, deploring the behavior of young people in the community, mainly in two aspects: the production of noise pollution (due to the volume of the music they listen to) and, they stated, the lack of respect young people of new generations have towards the elders. They argued that youth paid little attention to them when they were called to attention for some behavior that did not respect the rules of conviviality and good vicinity.

Four interviewees even mentioned how, in their youth, a kind of communal parental authority over young people was shared among all adults in the neighborhood. In the past, "it takes a village to raise a child" was a dynamic that allowed parental authority to be disseminated from every adult to the young, who, according to some of those interviewed, accepted the sayings of their elders. All of them pointed out this as one of the biggest challenges that the Neighborhood Council has. They said the key question is how to have productive communication with young people in the community. This immediately became an issue of work inputs for the workshops.

Another element that deserves to be highlighted is the explanation of the positive evolution that the neighborhood has experienced (especially in terms of infrastructure) due essentially to the work done by the Neighborhood Council. For example, the issue of sewage drainage was

mentioned, which, although rebuilt in an essential part of the neighborhood with another remaining to be completed, has generated great relief for most of the sector.

Access to clean water was also discussed, with four people talking about the situation before when people had to go and carry water from distant places surrounding the neighborhood. The issue of electrical energy was another of the elements cited by 6 of the interviewees, who recalled that it was an element of change thanks to the efforts of the Neighborhood Council. José stated, "We carried out the procedures before the competent entities, and with a true entanglement that existed, because many connections to the energy power system were illegal, so we were able to talk and mediate between the community and the electricity distribution company so that pre-paid system could be installed here in the community," emphasizing that now the supply is more stable.

When asked about their involvement with the Neighborhood Council, the majority, except Miledys, is the only woman contributing to community service through the Church. Tato, a young man who recently arrived in the neighborhood, confirmed their permanent participation in the Council, which has existed since 1993. Many participated continuously; among those interviewed, two served as president: Yanio and José.

From Durkheim to El Progreso: The Neighborhood Council and the division of labor

One of the most exciting things I learned about the Neighborhood Council practice is its functioning based on a division of tasks organized in a series of missions and distributed according to each member agency. For example, Pepe is in charge of "Infrastructure," and his mission is all

the work that has to do with construction works, which is his professional job outside of El Progreso. Pepe explained his responsibility:

> "…for example, if we have to cement…at least the back part of the alleys, all that area where cementing needs to be done, we join a group of the same members of the Neighborhood Council, and sometimes the community, sometimes. [so] those who know that they work with me, we come together and do that type of work with the help of institutions that provide us with the cost of the cement we need."

Panasco, in turn, works as a motorcycle taxi driver, a prevalent job among the unemployed youth in the Dominican Republic. He is a man who looks vital and young. I always saw him being in the roundabout, the agora of El Progreso, where the young and the not-so-young gather. In the Neighborhood Council, Panasco is in charge of security, and this is how he describes his work:

> "I try to get together with the guys who love to get together and listen to loud music. In those "teteo," as it is called here, I talk to them when they will do some activity here. It is not that I tell you not to do it. I usually talk to them and suggest: Go and request the permit because things need to be done well..."

Panasco describes how, although there are no severe security problems, "there are always unscrupulous people who are looking to take from people the little they have." He adds that, as part of one of his tasks, video surveillance cameras have already been installed in the 911 emergency and police systems.

Ricardo is a lawyer. One of the most structured in terms of his thinking, according to the answers he provided to the concepts requested in the interviews. He has a clear and integral vision regarding community problems and how to deal with them democratically. Ricardo is in charge of the environment in the Neighborhood Council, which deals not only with solid waste but also with sound contamination, a severe problem in Dominican barrios, especially in places like El Progreso that are so densely populated and with so many conflicts arising among neighbors due to this. He explains his role:

> "Yes, that is the part that plays when a complaint from some community member is filed before us. We try always to be accompanied by the president of the Neighborhood Council and other members because we support each one in our roles. We do not act alone but rather inform other members of the situation. We try to inform and intervene in a friendly manner in each case. We constantly have invitations from the police authorities, we visit the neighborhood Prosecutor's Office, we always have exchanges with the authorities to try to ensure that the sector develops its activities in the best way..."

When I question him about what his colleagues have told me before about the problem of living together in such a small place, Ricardo answers me:

> "If it knows the conglomerate, knowing that we have a bricklayer next to us, a doctor, but that next to that doctor, an engineer lives, so that diversity causes different behaviors. I then try to see where the problems arise from, where the situation arises from, and we treat it as such: we talk to the doctor as a doctor, and in his capacity as a professional, he will

understand our language, it will be how we express ourselves with them. The same is true for the construction worker: we treat the worker and try to make him understand that we must support each other. We are neighbors; we share the same area. Therefore, we must be considerate and take them to understand the situation. If the case transcends to another level, we have tried not to bring any case to the level of the authorities because it will be different. Nevertheless, we try to understand them, see their [intellectual] level, their living conditions, then take care of them, to understand why we are intervening in the situation created…"

This enunciation provided valuable input later for one of the workshops and served as an example of good pedagogical leadership in local democracy praxis. The critical point here is how solidarity is organized among the neighbors, who may seem powerless but, by examining their members' different experiences and resources, become a powerful team capable of many things. Again, Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed message about union pops up here.

The Neighborhood Council in action: history of a case

Conducting the interviews was a vibrant experience. While I was interviewing Tato, in a corner of El Progreso, just in front of his house, José, the president of the Neighborhood Council, passes by, almost running, and informs Tato that someone just died. José informs the investigator that an accident has occurred, but without going into details. I continue the interview with Tato. After an hour, while I was doing another interview with Santos, José arrived where we were. I stopped the interview, and there began a dialogue between José and Santos about the situation we

had previously been informed about. A Dominican woman of Haitian descent, very old and living in conditions of great misery, has just died. Her daughter and grandson, in conditions of extreme psychological, intellectual, and material vulnerability, do not know what to do. José and Santos must call INACIF (National Institute of Forensic Sciences), the state agency in charge of removing dead bodies on public roads or in private spaces.

However, there is a problem: the deceased older woman does not have any identification documents; she never did, as is common with many Dominicans from the lowest socioeconomic strata, especially those of Haitian descent. The dialogue between José and Santos focused on the procedures that must be done so that INACIF can lift the body, take it to a funeral home, and then bury it. José mobilizes and talks about the procedures being carried out with Yanio, who was informed that a sworn statement must be made with seven witnesses from the community so that they can provide proof and faith of who the deceased was in terms of identity. As a lawyer, Santos informs José about the requirements and procedures that must be followed.

The case is worthy of study as vicinity politics: the *in-situ* action of the Neighborhood Council as an immediate defense of the community's interests and support of the most vulnerable people. What is remarkable here is how the Neighborhood Council, which does not have a legally instituted social assistance function, takes action instead of the state, which has the resources and institutional mission to do it. According to José, the INACIF said that if they did not seek the notarial record of the seven witnesses, they would not remove the body.

This evidences how public policies in the Dominican Republic are usually conceived from a bureaucratic perspective, leaving the ordinary citizen as the primary person responsible for their fate. In this case, once again, the role of the Neighborhood Council is verified, not only as a means of protection for the humble against the elements of life but as the very possibility of a path to

reinvent local democracy in the Dominican Republic and as an alternative means to be able to put it into effective practice.

Communal capital

To find a reference from which to identify the added value that each of the interviewees could contribute to the joint effort that the Neighborhood Council could undertake, I resorted to the creation of an operational concept that I define as "communal capital," conceived of as the provision of skills and intellectual knowledge, social or psychic-affective, possessed by a person, and potentially mobilized by, that is capable of contributing to the common good of a community and its organization[11]. The communal capital of a social agent is established heuristically by structuring the specific space and time of the community to which the individual can contribute. The community is conceived here as a field comprising its inhabitants' needs, interests, and organizational capacity or agency. Although a person practices communal capital, communal capital is defined by its relationship with the immediate group in which it acts, in this case, the Neighborhood Council acting with legitimacy and in the interest of the greater community it serves. Below is a brief portrait of each of those interviewed in the first round and the communal capital identified in each one.

A prosopography for social action

[11] This notion is inspired from Lewin's field theory law (1951), its version sociologically worked on by Bourdieu (1997), as well as the notion of social capital by Van Til (2000) and Robert Putnam (2000).

Based on people's personal history, here is the equivalent of visual artists of a catalog *raisonnée* of a community, in this case of prospective participants in the project, with an inventory of assets susceptible to contributing to organized communal action. Also, it is an opportunity to present their individual stories and voices here in the exercise. Finally, as a researcher, I found it a box tool that could be used throughout the workshop as a critical cartography of the group.

Panasco. He is a strong 41-year-old man, but he looks very young and, above all, very active. He works as a *moto concho*, a motorcycle taxi service, which is the most used means of transportation by residents of the neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic. Panasco has been living in El Progreso for 31 years. He oversees the security aspect and everything concerning the neighborhood's tranquility. To describe the neighborhood, in the interview, Panasco used percentages to classify the cooperative, indifferent, or annoying types of attitudes of the population in the neighborhood. He defines democracy as respect for opinions and their practice. He believes in the unity built by consensus. His communal capital: Due to his youth, he has excellent legitimacy amongst the neighborhood's general population, the vocation to exercise credible leadership, especially among the young people who know him, and he knows how to dialogue with and treat them respectfully. He frequently organizes mass sports tournaments with them, even with other neighborhoods. He has social sensitivity. He is concerned about older people in the town. He is always active in the Rotonda, the center of public interactions in El Progreso. At the same time, he knows how to dialogue with the police in the sector.

Daniel. He receives us in the living room of his house, which also serves as a barbershop, one of his many jobs. He is 51 years old and has lived in El Progreso for 30 years. He has time because

he is at home recovering from a health condition and has the financial resources to support himself and dedicate time to work for the community. His voice is widely heard within the Neighborhood Council. He defines social justice as a matter of rights and discusses equality and equity between people and public policies. He holds the position of head of the disciplinary committee within the Neighborhood Council, in which he says he only had to intervene once to mediate an internal conflict. Communal capital: he is a very calm man; he says that the members of the Neighborhood Council must know how to speak the language of young people. He knows how to interact with them and has the authority of his years in the sector and life. He serves as an intermediary between his colleagues and the neighborhood youth.

Tato. He is an electrician and plumber. He reached the 4th grade of primary school, with 48 years of life and 20 years living at El Progreso. In the Neighborhood Council, he is in charge of public spaces in the barrio. Tato is active in his role and carries it out with a sense of community. He knows that the Neighborhood Council is always more substantial in legitimacy when it acts as a collective body instead of individually. Communal capital: He is always willing to participate in activities, especially at the parking level, which sometimes needs people 24/7 because emergencies arise and parking issues are permanent. He believes in consensus and works closely with the council president.

Santos. He is a very calm man. He is an accountant and currently practices as a lawyer. He is 62 years old and has lived at El Progreso for 25 years, serving on the Neighborhood Council for 14 years. He defines democracy as a story in which everyone participates in its construction. He talks about social justice as the possibility of everyone having their problems solved according to their

needs, such as the search for the common good and a fair redistribution of community resources. He is in charge of legal affairs for the Neighborhood Council. Communal capital: He has a serene voice that is widely heard in the wisdom provided by life. He knows how to manage the critical concepts of political science, essential when dealing with the public arena and any vital reform that could be introduced in the Neighborhood Council. He handles essential concepts that can be decisive in connecting community decisions with state institutions.

Miledys. The only woman among those interviewed. She has yet to be part of the Neighborhood Council previously. She is 54 years old, 6 of whom have lived in El Progreso. She made it to the 2nd year of a bachelor's degree in computer science. She does her community work directly from the Adventist Church, where she is a leader. She opens and closes the church and lives with her family next door. She was the first to speak on equality in the interviews, most likely due to her being a dark-skinned black woman, which also makes her a person with racialized experiences, but also with training from her membership in the church. People with this type of training in social work through church usually develop a social sensitivity, instruction in leadership matters, and education, with a vocabulary more extraordinary than ordinary for a person in their position. Communal capital: Being the only woman with a great sense of equality, her prestige can serve as a bridge to achieve a gender vision within the policies of the Neighborhood Council and lead them. Also, her prestige as a woman, which is usually more respected than men in public actions, as well as her non-militancy in any political party, can be a contributing factor when it comes to seeing and facing specific problems, starting with that of the trust and moral authority that the actions of the Neighborhood Council can generate.

William. He is 48 years old and has only lived in the area for 3 years, but he has earned the sympathy of the neighborhood. He has a health condition that kept him on medical leave. Although shy, with relatively little experience in the Neighborhood Council compared to his other colleagues, his permanent presence in the activities is very important. His communal capital lies in the fact that I always saw him visible and active in front of the roundabout. This presence, always available, can be used by the Neighborhood Council to carry out joint tasks. He gets along very well with José, the president, with whom he has interacted with public offices on behalf of the community. This presence can be beneficial when it comes to generating the actions that need to be taken by several people.

José. He has been President of the Neighborhood Council for several periods, including the current one in which the interview was conducted. José is the pillar of the Neighborhood Council, the creator, his driving force, and animator. His experience is undoubtedly crucial for the council. Communal capital: His experiences make him an encyclopedia of bureaucratic procedures and processes before the public authorities. He is part of the country's governing party. That can represent an obstacle because it can alert people about partisan politics in community affairs, but at the same time, making correct use of his social capital can help the community to obtain different elements from public powers, including strengthening internal programs of the Neighborhood Council. His political philosophy of poverty was very thought-provoking. He explains poverty as a result of inequality in the redistribution of resources and expresses sensibility toward the poorest in the community, particularly immigrants from Haitian origins. He has a political vision of the causes in which they are found, socially speaking, as a community and territory of poverty; that

is, he does not only seek to solve specific problems but also looks at the structural causes, which can be vital when proposing a route of changes for the Neighborhood Council.

Enrique. Despite his youth, he is one of the more experienced and best-oriented for a Neighborhood Council of the future. At 44 years old, one of the youngest in the group, he has lived in El Progreso for 12 years. He works for the private sector and joined the project for his reasons. He does not belong to the Neighborhood Council. However, he is one of those who most clearly presented proposals and solutions for young people, citing the issue of the lack of employment and opportunities for them, including sociocultural animation programs, using sports and workshops, and vocational-technical training. He was very precise in answering the questions about the concepts of democracy, social justice, and dignity I asked for. The first day he went to the meeting, invited by a friend, was when he got motivated. His social profile and integration are very similar to the rest of the participants. He is well-read and is connected with current issues. His communal capital has much to do with his access to contemporary topics like technology. It has been updated significantly regarding international politics and other elements typical of Dominican society. His intellectual degree undoubtedly makes him a capital full of promises and possibilities not only to contribute to a better sector of El Progreso but also to the Neighborhood Council itself, which would take advantage of its modernity, its understanding of the things that give it imagination, innovation, with a fundamental human sensitivity.

Yanio. After José, he is the other one who has been President of the Neighborhood Council in the group interviewed. He has much experience in party politics and works, like José, in public office. He is 52 years old. He was born in El Progreso. He is in charge of fundraising in the Neighborhood

Council, which has not been sufficiently structured because, without external funds, it is difficult for the population to draw from its resources. He says that democracy means having rights. He advocates for the sector's unity and recognizes that community work is the only thing that can establish sufficient strength to move forward. Communal capital: Although he is very busy with his family affairs and work, he is a committed community member. His work capacity and knowledge make him a privileged interlocutor with the public institutions he knows (personal contacts, bureaucratic processes, language to use, etc.). His experience is vital as an internal mediator in situations that arise that require the rapid intervention of its members.

Ricardo. He is one of the most lucid and clear interviewees in conceptual terms of the entire group. He provided textbook definitions of what democracy is and its local applications. He supports tolerance and respect as the basis of democratic pluralism. Out of all of them, he is the only one who mentioned that the richness of El Progreso lies precisely in its diversity; as such, for the Neighborhood Council to carry out a proper democratic process, it has to assume a perspective of first understanding the diversity of language and provisions that must deal with a very heterogeneous community. Ricardo is 67 years old, with 45 years in the sector. He is in charge of environmental issues that deal not only with solid waste but also with the problem of noise pollution. He best defined his role from the point of view of democratic leadership, that is, understanding and constructive. Communal Capital: Ricardo, despite a serene, passive, and even reflective attitude, is one of those who best articulates the foundations of local democracy. His vision combines both a democratic institutional vision and a praxis loaded with it. With Ricardo, the essence of the contribution is not in the conceptual definitions, which his colleagues handle (some more than others) relatively well. The essential thing about Ricardo's communal capital is

his typical sense of democracy, as a common faith in collective intelligence, as a way to broaden and enrich each person's life in the community. In the interview, I could appreciate how he treated his mother, who was already very old, in precarious material conditions but with the dignity of a monument. Smelling that humanity was suddenly returning to the essence of life itself. Listening to him talk about his community was a transposition to the collective sphere of the same attitude of love and solidarity he had with his mother. He is a pragmatic intellectual of his community. His level of writing can be decisive the day you have to write a manifesto or local constitution for El Progreso.

Fidias. He is the only one in the group who does not live in the community, but it is as if he was born there. His figure represents those people who usually serve with community work in a neighborhood other than their own, which is parallel to their profession and family life, and who earn the respect and affection of the community members they care for. Despite being a doctor in hydrology and having studied in Mexico, Holland, and the United States, Fidias decided to dedicate his life to community service, and he does so in El Progreso through the Church in which he exercises his religious practice. He has permanent contact with the reality of the neighborhood despite it not being his own. He has a privileged relationship with many young people from the neighborhood whom he has already had the opportunity to lead in the different groups and activities he has been in charge of over almost 22 years of social work in El Progreso. Communal capital: It is always essential to have an external figure who enters and leaves the community and has a level of legitimacy. Fidias is a figure who serves as an advisor and a point of contact with institutions and sectors of Dominican society, which members of El Progreso may need help accessing. I remember that, at one point, we had to contact this supermarket chain that had acquired

land nearby, and due to uneven ground, a protective fence had given way. There was a danger to the lives of passersby, and that supermarket chain had to be alerted. No matter how many requests the community members submitted, the situation was never resolved. The intervention of Fidias, using his social capital, was finally able to put pressure on those bodies, and they could put up a protective fence. He is a mentor or advisor of great moral authority in the community.

Pepe. At 58 years old, he arrived at El Semillero when he was just 9 years old. Pepe has seen many changes in his 49 years residing in the sector, especially in the area of construction, which is his job, a matter for which he is also in charge of the Neighborhood Council itself. Pepe is shy in front of the camera. In fact, during the interview, his father comes over and sits down to listen to him. When I asked if he wished to participate, the father said he did not want to be recorded. He alludes that he does not get involved in anything. It reminds us that although we might think that representation before the cameras can elevate people's dignity, suddenly turning them into experts of knowledge that they carry out in their daily practices, I must also take into account the history of authoritarianism that has been traditional in the DR to those who dare to say some things. Therefore, I always maintained caution in the face of those for whom the camera could generate some symbolic violence. Communal Capital: Pepe is a member of the Neighborhood Council. He has that generosity in which solidarity is expressed through contributing with their know-how. He is in charge of everything that involves the construction of sidewalks, streets, pipes, etc. The Neighborhood Council has a safe, discreet value, but he is always present for what is missing and any call.

Closing remarks

During the first stage of information and recruitment, several lessons help me review some elements:

1. From the different actions of meetings, interviews, and participant observations, I got to know the El Progreso neighborhood better and the social realities of its inhabitants.
2. I learned about the Neighborhood Council and its operating dynamics, the importance of vicinity politics, and its logic as a basis for an experimental and pragmatist essay for fostering local democracy.
3. Similarly, the community of members of the Neighborhood Council and guests got to know me as a human being, sociologist, and educator.
4. In this phase, the participants also learned about the project, community intentions, academic objectives, content, methods, and learning times.
5. I found a very hard-working community that lives (or survives) in material poverty but has significant moral assets: solidarity among its inhabitants, the common sense that prevails among them of good neighborliness, respect, and good humor despite their precariousness.
6. I was able to identify the main problems of the community: the great demographic density of the neighborhood as a source of social conflict, communication problems between the young and adult generations, coexistence problems linked to noise pollution produced by loud music played by youth and the limited space for recreation of an entire very active young population (from numerous children, adolescents and young adults population): infrastructure problems, precisely, narrow streets, buildings built without the proper

permits and safety measures, absence of pipes for the evacuation of wastewater in an essential part of the sector, adequate public lighting, among other social situations linked to unemployment, the precariousness of life for the vast majority of its inhabitants and the deficiency of the public services they receive (when they receive them); absence of cultural and educational offers in the community, among many other situations.

7. I met with a member of the Neighborhood Council's governing body who is knowledgeable about the community, has an aptitude for service, and has extensive civic experience.
8. I learned, separately and sometimes jointly, the faith and ethical values shared by all the community members who participated in this phase.
9. I identified areas for improvement in the Neighborhood Council's internal organization, its capacity for agency before external bodies, communication with the community, and democratic and creative leadership in a place like El Progreso.
10. Beyond content, I identified the elements of visibility, organization of wills, and planning ideas and actions as the project's most critical pedagogical objectives at this fieldwork stage.
11. Given the sector's and its inhabitants' poverty, I identified the participants' social and personal vulnerability as a significant risk that could cause them to desert the project.
12. I identified that hope can be obtained from the participants, their interests, and motivations for service through assembly, shared knowledge, and the encounter with new possibilities of action. The goal is to challenge the reality of resignation that living in a reproduction circuit usually produces: intergenerational poverty. Without expecting it, the information and recruitment phase became long, and the project's first workshop, where all participants, including myself, learned much from each other.

Chapter 5: Workshop 1: Reconstructing Hope and Purposes

The topics discussed would be what a community is, specifically in poverty, how it is organized according to democratic principles, and the ideas of community and social justice. The goal is to establish a general framework of understanding that provides a taste for shared knowledge extracted from the participants' experiences and accumulated knowledge.

During the sociological interviews conducted in the first stage of the fieldwork, it was confirmed that the notions of community, democracy, and the role of the Neighborhood Council were relatively well-known and handled by most interviewees. I needed to socialize these concepts again to consolidate their presence in the workshops and the consciousness of people who did not participate in the interviews.

It was clear, for example, given what I found in the interviews, that notions such as Social Justice and Dignity required more time for discussion than others in the workshops. This is so that we can collectively reflect on the connotation that ordinary language assigns to these words in contrast to what these words seek to represent.

For example, social justice was assimilated by the participants as a reference to the Justice system, which is the closest thing they have had as a concrete image of the name itself. Regarding the notion of dignity, for instance, they understood it to be “something good” and nodded when asked but had no precise idea of what it meant or meant. Thus, the frame of concepts initially designed in the project (see the third chapter of this thesis) was carried out without alteration. Here is a recapitulation of the notions to be worked on in the first workshop as they were initially formulated:

I. Community (collectively analyze first the nature of the neighborhood society in which the participants live, contrasting reality versus ideal).

II. Dignity (the characteristics of a human condition indispensable for the well-being and peaceful coexistence of people: goal and expected return of the project).

III. Local democracy (the participatory framework to achieve that goal).

IV. Social Justice (the equity criterion for correcting and achieving the goal of universal dignity, i.e., for everyone in the community).

Once the fieldwork had begun in the stages before the first workshop, the novelty was that boarding these notions in a first workshop could also contribute to strengthening the intellectual interest in the project and the motivation to get involved in the participants. Specifically, I was interested in restating the notions as an essential pedagogical exercise of iteration for the versed and newcomers. It all seemed very fragile regarding commitment to the project; every resource available must be used carefully.

The operating scheme was that these notions fed off each other, forming a coherent ensemble of ideas that could find concrete material forms in the neighborhood's realities and the participants specific daily lives. In addition, these four notions simultaneously served as a pedagogical exercise to discipline objectives, make goals visible, and avoid conceptual dispersion or confusion.

Thus, for example, to speak of an authentic and sustainable community, which was not a mere conglomeration of people, the condition of dignity had to prevail in each of the members of that community. Nobody responds well to aggression in their honor. For this dignity to be achieved

and guaranteed, the community had to be framed within a system of democratic coexistence, which, in a context of poverty - with so many individual and collective inequalities and injustices – could become not an easy task. First, it requires reestablishing people's esteem, respect, and trust in each other.

This could be achieved through social justice and equity policies as a principle: "to each according to his needs and each according to his possibilities." This last element was the basis of everything because it could launch the idea of an efficient local democracy as the ultimate goal for the Neighborhood Council. It was necessary to start by knowing the assets and burdens of the community: the former, to mobilize them in their potential, expand them, and grow in the face of the latter's limits, usually immovable if they depend on third figures or structures outside the neighborhood, as impoverished social contexts typically function.

Thus, the objective of the first workshop was for the participants to leave with a clear idea of the project’s aim (organized local social action) and how the different components of it and themselves, collectively and individually, would contribute to that objective.

The workshop began with a religious prayer among the participants at their initiative. In it, emphasis was placed on the future use of the lessons produced to benefit all, the Neighborhood Council, and the community of El Progreso.

Thirteen initial interviewees and five new people (two women and three men) had arrived, although we started thirty minutes after the hour we were supposed to begin. There were 15 of us, plus the cameraman and an assistant, to distribute and collect the materials and informed consent forms that would be filled out that day.

Informed consent: Sowing trust amid so much uncertainty

During the stage before the workshops, I felt anguish after checking the project's vulnerability in the first observations. This state had several sources. The first, of course, as already explained, was the precariousness of life in the inhabitants of El Progreso and how that would be transferred to the commitment of the future participants, and not only in terms of the elements of daily life that could get in the way. Above all, I was focused on the traditions of apathy and lack of faith that things could improve with a project like the one I had in my hands and to which I was inviting them to participate. However, other sources of lesser magnitude of anguish would soon emerge.

The issue of reading and signing the informed consent form is worth mentioning. As a sociologist, I had identified that the issue of the requirement requested by Teachers College for said form would be a delicate matter that I had to know how to handle according to what I could find as a reaction from the future participants.

It was a time when they still did not know me and did not trust in me, and the project was beginning to exist. I knew I would encounter some opposition and could undermine the participants' motivation for the project. In reality, like the Dominican one, the support of public institutions against any abuse or deception caused by a third party to a citizen usually occurs according to the social status of that citizen. Moreover, due to a regime of legal consequences that works very deficiently in the country, the social agent, from all strata together, assimilates, incorporates, and forges trust to strangers according to their social status and position of power.

Hence, the great suspicion that is usually expressed by the Dominican of modest strata who not only live in conditions of significant vulnerability but with little legal and social protection

against possible abuses. The life of survival, where resources and opportunities are very scarce, makes the few assets available to be usually obtained by force, where the most powerful (in influence, or even physically) prevail for reaching them. As the Dominican people say, "he who does not run, flies," thus expressing the aggressive attitude with which people usually conduct themselves in complex and highly contested territory like any space with scarce goods and life opportunities[12]. Another expression that sums up this state of things very well, as the average Dominican assumes, is "going out into the street with a knife in one's mouth," comparing their current ways of obtaining their livelihood with the hunting exercise of cavemen. This level of veiled violence governs a large part of their relationships with one another or the other, especially if they are unknown.

This brief sociological digression on the context of coexistence in the Dominican Republic is evocative to help readers understand specific issues that may be taken for granted in other contexts, including Dominicans from different social logic than the one in El Progreso. This was linked to the following: I was apprehensive when I read the Informed Consent document, which contained four pages and three places for the participant to stamp their signature. Since the researcher, in this case, was someone strange to them, it would be difficult for them to dare to agree to sign it without some prior mediation. The researcher I was was unknown to them, and I also occupy a dominant position in Dominican society due to my academic credentials. I predicted that the cocktail of all these factors together would likely arouse particular distress in the

[12] This level of violence incorporated into their daily attitudes is not only a product of survival in the present, but it is also fueled by the accumulation of years, sometimes intergenerational, of feelings of injustice translated into social resentment, with the shortages and concrete signs of inequality that they face in their daily lives when they leave the neighborhood. As the widespread saying among Dominicans goes, survival is like a "garage with a fist," alluding to the game played at children's birthday parties, where a piñata is opened with candies falling to the ground. The children search for the candy in the piñata, with those with the greatest strength prevailing to obtain the best and most candies possible.

participants, who would be “chivo”[13] (goosebumps) or suspicious when faced with the form's action. Why fill out this form? What implications will this have on my life? I wondered what these people would ask themselves: With so many problems in their lives, they would not add one more to an exercise in which they would already be contributing precious time.

I immediately understood that the best way this form could be filled out without any imposition or doubt remaining in the air, which could weaken the participant's connection with the project, would be in an atmosphere of greater certainty for the participants. This would only be achieved with the presence of others and, above all, Fidias and José, the figures of greater social legitimacy in the group, which could generate a feeling of security among the participants. In this sense, I anticipated that this informed consent could be filled out during the first workshop session and not before, and then I could ask the participants for their trust.

I submitted my sociological prediction to the test of the facts. From the first three interviews, I perceived a subtle annoyance on the part of the participants when I mentioned and explained the document's requirements and asked them if they could sign it. When approached, Pepe, Panasco, and Daniel cautiously evaded the question. When I realized the resistance, I limited myself to telling them that they had to fill out an acceptance form but that it would be preferable to do so in a session with the entire group. They nodded in agreement as if they were responding with that body language, validating the decision as the safest.

Of course, for the rest of the interviewees, I preferred to postpone the request to fill out the form until a better opportunity, although I informed them that we would do it during the first workshop session. Although this seems unrelated to the substantive matters of the project, it did tell me a lot about the culture of the people I was going to work with. Moreover, it helped me

[13] A popular expression to describe the typical attitude of the Dominican of thinking that they may be being deceived.

adjust my temper and manners to the context I was entering. Those are the typical sociological issues that can become crucial for the adult educator I was soon to come into practice.

When we finally opened the first workshop, I chose to place the topic of Informed Consent and the signing of the document as the third point on the agenda for the day. It should not be the first because those present were getting to know each other, including some I had never met who had not gone through the previous interviews[14].

Nevertheless, even with those who had already been interviewed, there needed to be some additional breathing room, with a little more experiential testing, to generate sufficient familiarity with the interviewee and the researcher and thus establish their trust in the project. For that possibility to exist, the participants needed to have a first experience of real immersion and, therefore, obtain a better assessment of their participation in the project. Again, if I insist on going into this in detail, it is because it is perhaps one of the most delicate moments where everything could collapse.

The more knowledge the project participants had about it, the more voluntary and fear-free their adherence to it and the signing of the informed consent form would be.[15] That is why I

[14] All the fieldwork was subject to the participant's vulnerability and uncertainty. It was impossible to plan processes counting on the regular participation of all participants. It must be known that these are people who agreed to participate of their own free will, without any coercive element established and without any a priori known counterpart other than that of participating via invitation from someone else. For people in survival social contexts, the reason for a project to improve the organization of the community may seem a mile from their immediate interests. Therefore, keeping participants informed and motivated to continue to the next round or phase became the main practical objective of the researcher and, at the same time, the primary source of creation.

[15] As an educator, I had to remember working with a context and subjects with a long history of disappointments and within complex uphill social dynamics. The project had to be sensitive to these situations and their effects on the participants' personalities. This elasticity or sociological sensitivity of the educator would give the educational action a necessary anchoring with the reality in which it would interact, especially the hidden reality that underlies the subjectivity of the participants and their familiar and individual life stories, which is not necessarily known a priori. Here, the educator functions as a kind of archaeologist of his processes, who searches in the social and pedagogical reality found in his exercises for elements or historical clues that could critically lead us to better understand the transactions between his pedagogical offer, on the one hand, and his educational demand, on the other. This could lead to reviewing the plan and constantly ratifying or modifying his initial pedagogical strategies until finding an optimal meeting point between them. Thus, sociological pragmatism, as a democratic praxis of socially informed educational leadership, would always seek to identify the best possible conditions for the participants and the development of the educational process.

postponed the time we would dedicate to explaining, reading, and completing the Informed Consent form to the middle of the session—a reminder that trust is earned on the ground and step by step.

Preliminary talk: What does it mean to impeach reality?

One of the first moments' goals was to stir the spirits of the Neighborhood Board members and guests out of their social inertia. That necessarily involved challenging reality, that is, not staying in the present and thinking that another reality, better than the current one, could be possible. In other words, challenging reality means, for the educational purposes of the project, rebuilding hope for a change, grasping it, and organizing a way to achieve it through concrete social events that are still to happen.

I began by presenting the project in general. I then constructed the general problem based on the title: impeaching reality. What does it mean to impeach something? I asked the assembly, and immediately, one of them, who studied law, answered, “When you do not agree with something.” Next, I carried out the same exercise that sociology uses to construct its object: starting from doxa, a commonly discussed opinion, essentially based on perceptions and reproduced and digested without critical intervention[16].

I told the participants it was about taking the reality around us as an object of study to improve ourselves as personas and as a group belonging to the Neighborhood Council's

[16] Just like Plato's allegory of the cave, where things are confused with the understanding of things, assuming as realities, mere points of view based on impressions, biased by tradition and by the angle of view of the opinion giver.

functionality. My purpose was to contribute to converting its mere existence into a space of experiences with sense and meaning that could help the organization improve its social action.

Following the principles of Emersonian moral perfectionism adapted to the workshop context, I explained that living an experience is not enough to understand her, according to a sociological principle. I pursued the dialogue with the example of a specific case, and the truth was first presented through the facts: Living in our body is not enough to understand it fully. To know what is happening in our body system, I stated, we call upon specialized external knowledge, medicine as a science and the doctor as its professional, to be able to dialogue with the patient and thus build together knowledge about our body superior to that we have lived in it. To return to Dewey's expression, the public remained attentive to what I was saying; their friendly attention guided me through those first moments of the conversation.

In the same way that looking at our hand stuck to our eyes will not allow us to see the prints of our palm, we then need to take the distance to see our hand's details with clarity better. The same I shared with them happens when two people from different positions look at the same object; if we ask both people for a description, their description will be guided by what they see from their specific position. I illustrated the explanation, using the participants themselves as an example. The story people tell may vary, even if it is about the same person and at the same time that the description is made.

Then I provided another example: when one usually talks about something in particular, one tends not to speak only about it, but our judgment comes accompanied by the relationship with that something. So, for example, if I ask a group of Dominicans to talk about the culture of public

transportation drivers, they will most likely speak to me from their position as public transportation users.

Their stories will likely become a complaint box for those who suffer from the imprudence and recklessness these drivers drive according to popular perception about their behavior. However, I may need to hear more about drivers as human beings, their life stories, and their difficult work. That is how I may get to know their culture: its origins, dynamics, and structures.

In short, I explained that when we talk about a particular object, we usually do not talk about the object per se, but rather, without meaning, we judge that person or that thing instead of trying to understand[17]. When we act based on the judgment of one's expectations not being met by the other behavior, there is a distortion between the reality and how we want that reality to be. Judging is very different from understanding.

While with the first, we risk confusion, injustice, and aggression, seeking to understand something can help us appreciate the other and their actions as part of a context and logic, in which intentions are not usually personal but are carried with them by a social history that, in impoverished territories, usually brings with it violence. It helps us to soothe our relationship with our environment. We needed to understand our realities and neighbors before anything else, including judging others.

The participants kept their attention and nodded, and one or another intervened verbally. The ideas were presented and carried out in the form of a dialogue, which, after being exposed, the assembly was invited to participate directly in the form of interventions. Everyone was active, awake, and paying attention but still passive. They were making gestures and making very brief interventions.

[17] This approach to the search for truth would not be limited to the social sciences but to all knowledge, scientific or not, that seeks rigor in verifying the truth through facts, as William James postulated.

I then started discussing the everyday reality they described during the interviews. I first emphasized that everyone agreed that El Progreso was a peaceful, hard-working, supportive community with great potential. I reminded them that, despite the precariousness, they had clearly expressed the many possibilities for improvement, recognizing the Neighborhood Board as the ideal way to implement them.

Then, I went on to list the problems they argued existed precisely and were the most important in the community. I had prepared the class so that I could speak without reading or taking notes. Time usually flies, and I was aware of this. It was important not to waste time or people's attention. This was a moment to generate enthusiasm and faith that the project was worthwhile[18].

The above were the general principles. What was already known about the community, but which had not been treated as such in an assembly before. As sociologists say, it is something known but needs to be recognized, too. For this recognition to occur, an assembly was necessary, not to deal with an issue to be solved, but to try to understand it first. Therein lies the differentiating power that sociology, particularly social science, can bring to an educational program to strengthen a community's organized social action.

In the same way, the participation of an external actor was crucial. This may help the exit routine and the customary tradition of solving specific problems more urgently without necessarily

[18] In that first meeting, I needed to arouse enough confidence to continue strengthening everyone's participation in the project. I had to meet the expectations generated in the interviews. Moreover, as the participants intervened briefly with ideas, comments, etc., I confirmed and affirmed the climate of hope.

understanding them, cultivating a particular imagination that would relaunch motivation and creativity.

I did not go into much detail about the methodology except to say to the participants that the essential thing in adult pedagogy is to take advantage of the body of knowledge that life provides us with and that we often do not have the opportunity to use in the service of our growth, not even say a communal cause. I told them we were a kind of experiment: trying a new way of doing things in El Progreso and within the tradition usually Neighborhood Councils practice across Dominican barrios. As a group, I told them we needed to cooperate to extract from the box the variety of experiences we carried in everything that could help us organize ourselves. It is, therefore, to move from experience to information about experience and then manage it.

Taking advantage of this wealth of information, sometimes diverse, can be a real advantage because it makes us able to look at the same problem from the wealth of different or similar points of view experienced by the members of a group like the one we had, but always having the caution of an outside observer, which in this case was me, who could verify the consensus or contradictions in the light of what a specialized knowledge that would act as an auxiliary, such as sociology, was thus able to speak, discuss and say about the reality of El Progreso. To challenge reality was to challenge the silence about reality and, above all, to agree that there was a reality that needed to be changed and that could be changed.

Presentation of the workshops: Motivating the Libido S*ciendi*

Apart from gaining the participants' trust, this first encounter was about presenting the credentials of the series of workshops. It was about showing participants an attractive offer to

interest them and mobilize a curiosity more compelling than the usual indifference towards social organization and public affairs in contexts of poverty. I had the responsibility at that precise moment to create the conditions for an atmosphere that would transform the *libido sentient*, traditionally the most potent appetite in the humble classes due to their living conditions, into *libido sciendi* (or the appetite for knowledge) and from there, educate the *libido dominandi* (or the vocation for power) toward a democratic model of managing power. In Pascal's words, it was about converting or transferring the "lust of the flesh" (unrestrained for the impoverished classes and omnipresent in their realities) into the "lust of the eyes" (with little access to Dominican barrios) and putting them at the service of the development and practice of a "pride of life" in a democratic community (Audidière, 2008).

According to the original design, I presented the five workshops in the form of a scheme that may awaken the enthusiasm and intellectual aptitude for the project, something that was highly valued by those present, according to the comments they made at the end of the first session, many of the participants both directly to Fidias and to me[19]. This scheme presented, organized from a perspective of sociological pragmatism, worked in the following way:

Workshop 1: What is a community, specifically in the context of poverty, and how is it organized according to democratic principles? The topics would seek to establish a general framework of understanding that provides a taste for shared knowledge extracted from the participants'

[19] Fidias was a guide and intermediary between the researcher and the population. In this capacity, he received comments the participants made to him, which served as a compass when evaluating my performance. This type of figure is fundamental. Always choose a figure with sufficient legitimacy within the community who can be a link and channel of mutual trust between the participants and the educator. It is worth noting that before and after the sessions, many conversations were held between the participants and the educator. This also informed me a lot about how the workshop and learning took place. Attendance was the learning of faith in a collective project.

experiences and accumulated knowledge. My objective was to contribute to the reconstruction of hope and the purposes of social organization.

Workshop 2: The second seeks to learn about the census findings by SIUBEN and verify them by crossing that information with the project participants' experiential knowledge. Here, I aim to establish a tripartite conversation: the statistics, the experiential knowledge of the participants, and the sociological knowledge that I carried to arrive at a result as close as possible quantitatively, dynamically, and conceptually to the state of the community. My objective was to contribute to reconstructing the community's collective knowledge.

Workshop 3: Based on the results of these discussions, we would move on to a third workshop, where we would discuss and seek consensus, organized in groups and by community problems, on the priorities and viable solutions to these various issues. It was a re-engineering workshop. My objective was to rebuild the Neighborhood Board's response capacity to community problems and reach internal agreements on viable solutions.

Workshop 4: Once the problems and reactions of the Residents' Board were identified, a fourth workshop would be dedicated to organizing the action itself. This workshop will discuss how the Neighborhood Board will be organized before the instances or institutions outside it. The goal was to rebuild together the organization and planning of social action, that is, its capacity for agency as an organ.

Workshop 5: A fifth workshop was convened to make a general assessment of the experience itself and thus be able to generate a reflective process of interest to all and, at the same time, reiterate the central ideas that the experience sought, especially the functioning of a local democracy from a pedagogical leadership that is sensitive and understanding of the other and their circumstances[20].

Finally, to conclude this presentation phase, I reiterated to those present that this project was a research essay that, if successful, could be useful for other neighborhoods. I told them that SIUBEN had shown much interest in how such a model could strengthen not only the existence and quality of operation of the Neighborhood Council as a local mechanism for representing and defending community interests but could also help state agencies, such as SIUBEN itself, to rely on others Neighborhood Councils, and improve their services and data with the active participation of the community and its experiential knowledge. This reinforced the sense and, at the same time, the opportunity of the collective in the face of the project: the community thus became the epicenter of a public policy experiment and bid.

[20] Here, we talked about the possibility of making a video together about the community, which could serve as a general presentation of the community so that it could better illustrate the partners or entities to which the Neighborhood Board would need to turn to resolve specific problems. It would seek to project the characteristics of the community, its positive assets, and the pending situations that need to be resolved. The community members would be the protagonists, advised by me, and an audiovisual team I would invite. Participation would not be limited to the members of the Neighborhood Board or the project participants. The idea was that talents could be sought, for example, musical talents, so that they could participate in the infomercial, and a basketball game could also be organized with an outside team to show the dynamism of the community and its greatest asset: its people. It would be like an exercise at the end of the project.

Before finishing this presentation stage, I introduce the previously mentioned dynamic of filling out the Informed Consent forms. For the previously stated reasons about how the participants would perceive a form like that according to their vulnerable life contexts, I asked Fidias to conduct this stage. Fidias proceeded to explain what Informed Consent was and its importance. He asked the participants to have confidence in the process, and they all filled out the form. This process lasted approximately 10 minutes, and while it was being filled out, there was a break, which served as time to introduce the second part of this first workshop. Leaving for an intermediate moment to establish trust among participants seemed to have worked.

What is a community, and what is your contribution to it?

I took a dynamic approach to working on the first concept, community, which was relatively well answered during the participants' interviews. I started the second part by listening to a song collectively. In this part, I considered how to address the universe of notions working around (and within) the idea of community.

Understanding what a community is from the anthropological and sociological point of view and how its solidarity laws operate - or what is needed for them to operate - is not enough to carry out sustainable social work over time and with a proper democratic vocation. Above all, this starts with the problematic context of poverty in which a neighborhood like El Progreso survives. As it was initially conceived, it was now necessary to present and generate the possibility of

discussing and formulating the concepts of dignity, social justice, and local democracy, which could guide rebuilding the Neighborhood Council's social action.

The piece is by the Cuban-born singer-songwriter Frank Delgado[21], who speaks in the second person plural, addresses his listeners, and encourages them to treat better (and how to do so) their neighbors or coworkers they meet during the day. It was the perfect speech and medium to start the conversation on the topic in the middle of the first session. We could not listen to the song inside the church, but we could read the lyrics aloud with a few interventions[22]. So, I announced to the participants and motivated them as follows (reactions from participants are included):

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Now we will have a small musical participation for the Dominican people. Music, you are the Dominican people. Music is something fundamental; it enters the chest and develops and grows. Moreover, I want us to listen to this song by an excellent musician I like a lot. He is not from here; he is from outside, but he has fascinating lyrics about what a community is. When you listen to the song, I want you to think about two qualities that you could contribute to the community, for example, a human quality and a

[21] Dominican culture is very visual but also very sonorous. No matter the level of schooling achieved in its most vulnerable strata, due to the historical passivity of the Dominican school in terms of quality and coverage, Dominican neighborhoods assume a large part of their education from what they see and hear in their lives. Music, for example, not only serves as instruction through its lyrics but as an ancestral inheritance of the practice of enslaved people; it has also served in Dominican culture as a space for diminishing the existential anguish of living in precariousness in the face of the different needs and uncertainties linked to poverty. The song as a pedagogical instrument was imposed as an accessible resource, known by the participants, as well as integrative, due to the polysemic nature of its message, open to interpretation, and thus convening a discussion. Frank Delgado wrote, composed, and performed the song "Orden del día" (Order of the Day).

[22] For reasons of internal church rules, which I was unaware of, non-religious music cannot be played in the place of worship we were using for the workshop. So, I had to improvise and project the lyrics on a screen only, and I read them out loud with the lively attention of the assembly.

professional quality; what is the professional quality? What you are, if you are a construction worker, well, I can help with everything that has to do with the needed constructions here.

Participant: That is what he is in the Neighborhood Council.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Exactly. That is, it is how you contribute, the contribution of your profession; for example, Pedro is a motorcoach driver. I can contribute my moto concho in an emergency or an urgency if needed. That is what he can contribute. However, there are two human qualities: human quality and professional quality. The human one has to do with what I can contribute, well, my sensitivity and solidarity. I can contribute by knowing how to cook. I can contribute that I have patience with children, that I have experience caring for seniors or people with some disability, that I am older, and that I can give advice, which also contributes to the community.

So, I want us to listen to this song and think about those two qualities you will then say as we listen. Please put me on each of those pieces, those qualities, at the end of the song. In one, you have to put your human quality, and in the other, your professional quality, but first, we will listen and let the music inspire us. What is the human and professional quality that you are going to put on that card? Go ahead and turn off the light for a moment.

There was not much time to discuss the lyrics. The objective was essentially for the song to be a device to highlight how, in everyday life, similar to the one described by the song, we can

find treasures in our neighborhood, and all from a change of attitude and a different action in the way people look at their neighbors.

It was to awaken curiosity so that each present could investigate their daily life within themselves as an exercise in reflexivity. The idea was also to broaden the participants' sensitivity to the possibility of producing, through small daily gestures towards others, a type of intangible social wealth, not just material. Here are some of the lyrics of the song:

"The first step you must take when it is daylight
Is with the right foot like the great prophecy…

To all your neighbors, if life depresses them
Tell them about music or invite them to the movies….

…And if there are inopportune people, talk to them patiently
Moreover, sleep like a log, without having a guilty conscience…

Moreover, even if they call you crazy, smile without malice.
Give a compliment to the girl on the corner.

And when you return to work when you see the doorman
Greet him even if you are traveling in the front seat.

And ask the old concierge about her flowers
How her back woke up, how her pains are..."

After the song ended, participants nodded, with the smile that usually appears on the faces of those whose spirits recognize a phenomenon and recognize themselves in it when a word that has just been said or heard is made public. These were short interventions validating what was

happening. That was the green light to continue. On this occasion, pragmatist truth was verified by the economy of participants' gestures, which became proof of the veracity of the song's story and its correspondence with the facts and possible causes of what we discussed.

Then, I asked the participants to present themselves by writing on white cards distributed and reading them loudly. As a reminder, it is not just about knowing that everyone can contribute to the community but also becoming aware of what they can contribute. The practice was explained with concrete examples so that it could be understood, especially concerning the personal part, which is less evident than the professional qualities already duly defined and recognized by society. This involved reflecting on the points of personality that could be put to use in service of the community (disposition of time, voluntary aptitudes, temperament, etc.).

I addressed myself to the participants:

> So, thinking about those ideas, I would like you to write and say precisely what the singer said: What? What can one contribute to [the neighborhood] that which does not have? So, what can you contribute to the community from your profession and your being as a person? The community does not have what profession it does not have; if it does, it lacks or already has everything, but that is still what you can also give. So, write one of your professional qualities on one card and your personal qualities on a second card. The other has to be filled out. […] With your cards. So, now, you go. We are going to give you a moment to finish writing it. It is small, so now it is a quality word, a small phrase. So now I want us to introduce ourselves. We will introduce ourselves by saying, "Juan Miguel Pérez, professor and sociologist. I can contribute my knowledge of sociology and my time, for example."

Each of the participants then proceeds to read their responses: “I am supportive and can give hairdressing classes”, said one; “we are here for whatever is needed in any situation, and I have a motorbike that I put at your service”, said another. “I am very spiritual, and I have a stationery store here in the neighborhood, exclaimed one of the four participating women at the time”. Almost all of them expressed, more than particular personal qualities, a great willingness to serve the community. In the field of trades, a wall painter, another electrician, an interior decorator, a psychologist, a software developer, and a construction builder, among others, were registered. I reproduced here the exchanges verbatim of some:

> **Participant 1:** My name is Participant 1, and I am a professional dentist. I can share my knowledge of dentistry and collaborate with the community's leadership.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Very well, we continue here, Participant 2, you are following.
>
> **Participant 2:** Good evening. My name is Participant 2. I am a lawyer by profession. My human qualities include respect for others and understanding. My professional quality is providing my services and knowledge to whoever needs them.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Please put your names below. Please, participant 3, your turn.
>
> **Participant 3:** Good evening. My name is Participant 3. As a human being, I can advise younger people or whoever needs it. Secondly, as a professional, I am an electrical technician.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Well, okay, then we go this way, Participant 4.

Participant 4: My name is Participant 4. In the human sense, I support those with problems; I join them to help them. In the professional sense, I can give hairdressing classes. Thank you.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Very well. Let us go this way.

Participant 5: It is a perfect evening. My name is Participant 5. I am dedicated to sports and like to share them with the youth. They are always...

Juan Miguel Pérez: What sport? Sorry...

Participant 5: Baseball is what I like, and sometimes, here on the field, when the ticket sellers are there, supporting them is my thing.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Very well, excellent.

Participant 6: Good evening. My name is Participant 6, and I am from the El Progreso sector. I am a motorcyclist; that is my profession because that is what I have been given, and the Lord, that is what I have for now. Nevertheless, I will continue to move forward and see what the Lord brings us. We are here for any situation that has to do with progress. Good evening.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Thank you very much.

Participant 7: Good evening. My name is Participant 7. I am an accountant by profession, but I work in marketing, specifically automobile and industrial painting. I am at your service. As I said, I am now getting involved. We are at your service in everything that concerns the community.

Participant 8: My name is Participant 8. I am a professional technician in electricity, plumbing, and home remodeling. I enjoy serving others.

Participant 9: Good evening. My name is Participant 9. I am a plumber and electrician from the neighborhood. I help the community and the entire sector. Thank you.

Participant 10: Good evening. My name is X, but you do not know it. You know me as Participant 10. My profession was first a hairdresser; then, I had the local stationery store. I studied business administration and am most proud of being a Christian. In this way, I can help the community with the children who need something from the stationery store and their parents. Then they do not pay anything [right away], but thanks to God, who allows us to provide it, even if we do not have the money. Regarding the spiritual aspect, I help young people to behave better, to know that their lives are in God's hands and that they should not waste them but rather prepare themselves.

This exercise aimed to inform, expand, and sensitize the participants to their possibilities for helping the community. A complementary exercise was necessary to connect the general idea of community with the concepts of dignity, social justice, and democracy through promoting and practicing an informed and respectful economy of interpersonal exchange among community members, especially from the Neighborhood Council leadership toward its neighbors.

The dignified exchange, the basis of a democratic community

It was necessary to introduce into the moment the constitutive elements of a fair social coexistence in El Progreso, which would make the reality of a democratic community sustainable over time and whose social action should be linked to the principles of equity and universal and inalienable dignity of people. For this purpose, I used the lessons from the famous essay The Gift by Marcel Mauss, a founding text of anthropology on the structures and dynamics of social cohesion in communities.

According to Mauss, the cohesion of a society is based on the economy of honor and reciprocity exercised in exchanges between people. Mauss explained that the profound reason for exchange as a social function is that it privileges *being* over *having*. This is achieved through the recognition of dignity, which, through respect for others, manifests the social importance of equality between people. In communities with such inequality as the Dominican Republic, especially in El Progreso, exchanges occur essentially in goods and services paid with money.

This usually ends the exchange as a finite transaction each time the good or service received is paid. However, exchanges based on reciprocity, in which money is not involved, establish ties between those involved in which short, medium, and long-term affections are transferred. These affections are the ones that tie durable bonds among the members of a given community and, more importantly, assign social dignity to people[23].

These ideas were summarized in the following way: We all have something to contribute to the world due to the different capacities and knowledge acquired in the various life paths that we have had to go through. Everyone must know they can and have something to contribute to the community. No one is useless, and no knowledge is excessive, especially in a context with so many precarious conditions as the local one. We do not necessarily have to earn money to know that, in one way or another, we contribute to the generation of social wealth in a community, contributing to the joint effort that makes personal and collective lives possible. For example, security and care for others can be assisted by being in the house; tasks are usually carried out by seniors, who stay in the house all day. The task, as indicated, is to gather together a storehouse of attitudes, an assembly of people and their talents that can benefit, starting first by valuing the attitude of solidarity in the Neighborhood Council and then in the community later.

[23] This entire conception of the economy of affections and non-monetary exchanges was worked on by me in Échanger autre chose que l'argent, in the Manuel d'Économie Critique (Pérez, 2014).

I extended my explanation by emphasizing that the degree of harmony and collaboration depends on the quality of the exchanges between members. According to Mauss, what is given has materiality, in this case, the human or professional services of people. However, it also has a non-tangible side, the intention with which what is given is given. Mauss called this the *Hau*, or spirit of the gift. The explanation is that, according to how a good or service is provided at each moment, the bonds of solidarity between people can be enriched because a good gift promises a return. Every exchange is made between a person who represents the community and the person who receives it is a member of the same community, and so on in this sense.

Moreover, to generate an experience that was part of the learning exercise that had started before, I invited the participants to reproduce one of the rituals explained by Mauss in his famous essay, where in a circle, those present had to exchange among themselves the cards with their available resources (personal on one and professional on the other). The dynamic consisted of the following: we first passed the cards of human qualities to our neighbor on the left, who received them, and, in their turn, passed them to their left partners. Everyone gives and receives one. Then, we passed the cards where the professional occupations were written to our partners at our right hands. Again, each of us gives and receives one to and from one of us. The idea was that we are in constant exchange, where our neighbor is not just a neighbor but the society represented by one of us who gives us and to whom we give what we are personally. It is how we build a community through individual exchanges that represent unity from the group, social inclusion, and dignity through the exchange. Everyone participates, meaning everyone has something to give and receive, making them community members in equal conditions.

As in Mauss's Essay, the crucial thing here was to understand the importance of exchange for a community, from a game that would show how everything we give is returned to us, how in giving and receiving, we do not do it in our name, but as a social function. In giving and receiving, we assume a collective role in the community, and merely providing what we have best (our resources) implies accepting the other. Having something to give and receive integrates us into an exercise of belonging and balance that depends on the mobilization of benefits and their intentions.

In practical terms, the exercise was complicated and less fluid than expected. The participants needed clarification in the procedures with the whole group. I then reduced it to two or three participants so that we could understand what was being sought. The participants understood, and although the exercise was not carried out as we thought, it served as an exercise of integration, relaxation, and physical rapprochement. Due to the composition of the pews in the church hall, standing up and seeing each other generated a process of rapport that seemed very important to me for the consolidation of the newly formed group.

I felt constantly evaluated. I presented my communications, exposing myself and submitting myself to the judgment of the participants, whom I felt were a popular jury. Academic authority like the one I represented could generate apprehension, leaving people on the sidelines or timidly participating. However, gathering their voices (collected in the interviews and participant observations) and organizing them in my presentation significantly shortened the distance.

While the session was progressing, group integration was growing. So, it was the question of social knowledge. Being in front of people with such harsh lives and talking to them about it after just a few weeks of familiarity with it can be not very safe.

However, as the interaction started being validated by the public, I felt more confident about the integrity of my words. From this first session, I learned that contrary to fragmented and necessarily partial knowledge that people usually consume from the news or reproduce in streets or occasional gatherings, an organized reflection on the participants' multiple realities was putting together a sense of community through a community of senses. We all discovered that there was much more consensus and similar points of view and experiences than just individual life-happening. Putting a sense of direction to this plural variety of experiences gives the group a sense of meaning.

It was a reflective exercise in an assembly, where neither the person's ordinary experience nor the sociologist's theoretical knowledge could be constituted alone. Thanks to the conversation, cooperation, and co-authorship, a respectful and fertile dialogue was ultimately produced, enriching ordinary experience with sociological knowledge and vice versa in a very enlightening dialectical way. It was an epistemological adjustment that, moreover (and no less), was also a democratic tuning that legitimized a social truth.

This was so vital for those present that it necessarily invited social action. It has been, so far, my best moment as a sociologist. I was living as an educator, a sociology performed through acts.

From concept to concretion. Pedagogy of social pragmatism

Poverty, as such, is authoritarian. No one chooses to be born and grow up in such conditions, and even less to live their adult life in it. Living conditions in El Progreso are often arbitrary, not only on the material level (eating precariously, living in vulnerable and overcrowded

accommodation with very restricted means of subsistence) but also on the level of social support from public institutions. All of this tends to promote an undemocratic culture, in which the example of how society in general works under this pattern is usually transferred to the neighborhood and reproduced at the local level.

Clientelist policies, such as those usually exercised by mainstream politicians in contexts of poverty, tend to generate non-democratic distortions in the practices of any collective body such as the Neighborhood Council. Despite the political vision of the participants that is globally comprehensive of the neighborhood's problems and possible solutions, it seemed necessary to clarify and strengthen the understanding of the project's scope and, therefore, the contours of democratic action in the specific scenario of the Neighborhood Council. We only had a little time, were already running out of time, and still had that crucial point to address[24].

To quickly and practically link an abstract concept such as dignity, I translate it as respect for the person, care for their body (no one should physically or verbally attack anyone), their honor (the excellent name of the neighbor or a colleague of the Neighborhood Board should not be harmed), their social protection (nobody should be left alone in difficult situations). All this from a neighborhood perspective. With social justice, I work from the concept of equity (to each according to their needs). In the case of local democracy, I use a practical action element linked to democratic leadership. In all three cases, I use the example of the democratic educator, a figure whose exercise allowed us to address the three notions in an accessible way and, in the same example, the elements of idea and practice.

All democratic leadership, I said, has much to learn from the exercise of an educator. Moreover, all participants, in one way or another, whether because they are members of the

[24] It should be noted that at night, participants can make dinner at home, resolve situations, or rest.

Neighborhood Council or simply because they are there, have elements that make them perhaps privileged about their peers, whether in intellectual or economic terms. They all have the potential to be community leaders.

Having hope that things can change and getting involved in a project to explore that possibility already gave them a significant level of responsibility before their peers. Moreover, when we know that if the Neighborhood Council does not move in the direction of a problem, it is difficult for anyone to do so. The figure of the educator was essential to exemplify all I was looking for to promote here.

I began to give a series of examples of what a good educator does: first, the responsibility of understanding their student's attitudes, performances, problems, and backgrounds. Second, an educator bears the responsibility for what happens in the classroom or field of action that they direct, and any fate, whether positive or negative, forces the pedagogical leader to look for a way to improve, correct, or reinvent themself in case of not obtaining the expected results. Participants were involved in the comments in both elements, almost always finishing the reasoning I started with examples. It was a genuine collective dialogue, where they intervened without it feeling like any interruption. The conversation flowed, and the participation was full. Each one, in one way or another, intervened. There was no physical attitude, no indifference, no timidity.

I took advantage of that moment to say that, precisely, that assembly was doing democracy because it was not only having a parliamentary exchange, as in a true hemicycle of equals, but it was doing so in representation of an entire community, which far from replacing it, made it the protagonist of the event, by thinking about it before deciding on its fate, from mere opinions or traditions.

In that sense, it was an innovation on what was done before and what is usually done in traditional national politics, where people disconnected from the citizens and designed and decided the general laws with their interests and biases. This was not the case because they lived in the same community they sought to work in. However, in addition, they met to think in a new way about an old reality, and that would very probably allow new perspectives and processes to do things differently, uniting the different points of everyone, that widespread knowledge that comes from experience, enriched by auxiliary knowledge, coming from the social sciences.

Neither a politics of personal interests, partisan, ideological, or even unverified cultural or epistemological biases. We were faced, perhaps, with a situation of true socially informed pragmatism from different sources, controlled within its quality, unlimited in terms of possible imagination and its probable viability, confronted by a collective discussion with the conditions of the discussion site, and with the capacity for its reflexivity, a necessary condition for its sustainability over time. It was the first organized social action.

Moreover, I made it known. The figure of democratic leadership was imposed through the reflective educator, who builds knowledge in a dialectical exercise of co-production with his neighbor, literally. In this case, with his workshop partner, his neighbor. I felt that there was a science of the territory that was emerging, that is, knowledge in action, that is, a history that was produced and not just consumed, an investigation to think and act in the face of the days, the people and the realities that could be improved, in an organized way and under democratic qualities in ends and means.

This is a different conception of democracy than the one that has historically been used, not only because it is local but as a way of life, capable of reinventing itself as an organization of

knowledge and community action. I brought up the case of the deceased woman and the neighborhood council's reaction as an example of the advantages of neighborhood policy. First of all, if an action was carried out promptly, it is due to the primary bond between the daughter of the deceased and some member of the Residents' Board, in this case José, its president.

This primary bond of daily life sows affection and, in turn, sows responsibility for those who can do something over those who cannot. That is sensitivity and a sense of taking charge of situations that may arise. Second, the possibility for that woman to know how to turn to José was to recognize not only the Residents' Association (José is here an entity like Neighborhood Council, not as a person isolated from the body in whose name he acts socially) as the closest entity to the citizens, but to have the confidence to do so. In a country where people do not have the means of dialogue with public institutional bodies, this possibility of communication is not a minor fact.

Thirdly, all the knowledge and resources of the community were mobilized to deal with the situation of a deceased person who did not have papers, and the public authorities did not respond. They demanded that the family mobilize, but in this case, the family was the organized community precisely because it was organized in its capacity to respond to the contingency, even if it was only by a governing body of its Residents' Association. Immediately, criticism arose. Some said this would not have been resolved without their experience. "Let alone on a Sunday!" said one.

At the same time, it became clear that neighborhood policy was more than just a response to the lack of traditional policy. Neighborhood policy had advantages due to the proximity of the actors to each other, where rather than two sides. It is not like, on one side, the institution and, on the other, the people. The Neighborhood Council is the people acting together, mobilizing their resources with the priority of equity to pragmatically resolve the most urgent things. It was a living,

direct, mobilized democracy, and its institutionalism was practical, defined by the direct relationship between the people, their problems, and the possibility of organizing a social response. Given in conceptual terms, the participants seemed to understand and assume the concepts of community, dignity, justice, equity, and democratic leadership for the work of the Residents' Board; it was now necessary to work on how this response could be carried out effectively, and what the conditions were for it.

To reinforce this point, I referred again to the case of the deceased woman without identity papers. Could you imagine what it would be like to have prevented the situation of the documents? What if we organized an operation to be able to provide papers to those who do not have them in the community? The majority of the participants approved the measure immediately. However, I emphasized that we first need to manage the information of how many people do not have papers and the specific conditions of the cases we could find. That is the importance of knowing about our community with greater precision. Once that information was in our hands, I told the participants we could organize the action plan. It is what we would call, I told them, the planning necessary to avoid such contingencies as the one experienced last Sunday.

I am providing another example to reaffirm the importance of what we were doing in the workshop. This time, I wanted to bring an idea as a communal response not only to an emergency, such as the one experienced in the case mentioned above, but also as an element of novelty that would bring a visible degree of community organization. I mentioned the possibility of marking the exit routes from El Progreso. The streets are natural labyrinths, and it is difficult for anyone to enter and exit them. I pointed out to them that this signage would be necessary, especially for new visitors and emergency services or medical assistance in case of an emergency or catastrophe that requires the intervention of assistance.

In addition, I pointed out to them that this would be a visible way of seeing the work of the Neighborhood Council in organizing the community. It would bring just a little care and attention. People would feel that they are the objects of a policy of accompaniment. In addition, the community would be visibly organized, which would undoubtedly affect people's subjectivity and the general legitimacy of the Neighborhood Council. Everyone approved unanimously, with some looking enthusiastically surprised by the idea presented. This motivated people. This type of proposal attracts people towards a promise of well-being and strengthens their involvement in the project.

That is why it is essential, beyond making an inventory of the community's problems, to let them know that this is only the diagnosis, which, once established by them, then proceeds to their participation in the creative process of new things for a new community. In other words, it means knowing the problem, recognizing it (approved by everyone as a problem and from different experiences), and then discussing it, creating new paths of action, and planning them. This is precisely what we planned to do for the following workshop sessions.

I took advantage of this moment to reiterate, one more time, the sequence of the workshops and how they would serve that cause precisely. I did this in the form of a logical map, explaining the function of each workshop and its objectives.

Workshop 1: Reconstructing the hope and purposes of social organization

What is a community, specifically in the context of poverty, and how is a community organized according to democratic principles would be the topics discussed, seeking to establish a general framework of understanding that provides a taste for shared knowledge extracted from the participant's experiences and accumulated knowledge.

Workshop 2: Reconstructing the knowledge of the community.

The second seeks to learn about SIUBEN's census findings and verify them by combining that information with the project participants' experiential knowledge. Here, we seek to establish a tripartite conversation: the statistics, the participants' experiential knowledge, and my sociological knowledge to arrive at a result as close as possible quantitatively, dynamically, and conceptually to the state of the community.

Workshop 3: Reconstructing the responses to community problems.

Then, with the results of these discussions, we would move on to a third workshop where we would discuss and seek consensus, organized in groups and by community problems, around the priorities and viable solutions to these various issues. It was a re-engineering workshop.

Workshop 4: Rebuilding the organization and planning of social action.

The fourth workshop would be dedicated to the organization of action itself.

Workshop 5: Rebuilding local democracy from pedagogical leadership and agency.

A fifth workshop was called to assess the experience in general and generate a reflective process that would interest everyone.

Before concluding the workshop, one of the attendees suggested opening a WhatsApp group with the group members so that we could be better connected and that different materials related to the project could be shared during the week. Of course, I saw in this idea the opportunity to keep the flame of interest and commitment alive, which I always noticed was fragile due to, as I mentioned before, the life commitments of the participants and the little tradition of social organization in which an initial spirit of disbelief usually prevails in typical social agents, natives of the neighborhoods, such as the participants of the project.

The reconstruction of reality. An introduction to social change.

I wanted to address the participants with a synthesis of the project's purposes by the end of the workshop. I needed to raise the group's consciousness about the project's possibilities as their primary motivation source. It was essential to me to reiterate the fact that it was not just about a diagnosis of the community's problems; it was about the possibility of doing things differently to change certain things around El Progreso; it was important to me to make It clear that it was not just about the community, it was also a project for the personal growth of all of us as a participant. This is what I said to them, closing the session:

> The community is exchanged among people, and now comes the social world. We are the social world because we are what we inherit from the world. Nobody asked us where we wanted to be born or how we wanted to be—we inherit things. Moreover, when we realize it, we already speak like the environment we grew up in. We already have the possibilities that life has given us, but we do not necessarily choose them, so some people talk one way, and others behave the other way. All that is because we essentially inherit culture and most of the situations, conditions, and contexts in which our lives happen throughout our

existence. Some are born rich, some are born middle class, and some are also born poor. However, nobody chooses initially to be one thing or another. However, everything is how we react to those things in life, right? As you say, knowing how one deals with the little or the much that one has is essential. Moreover, we are here to think, discuss, reflect, and plan what to do for El Progreso, with the little or much we may have as a group, [as a community, or right here as a Neighborhood Council].

How does one change, to change, to not remain static? If someone has much money, what do I do with so much money? If someone has little, how do I get more without harming someone else? How do I share? How do I improve? How do I build patience if they come and I am very desperate? If I eat a lot and I am going to gain weight, and that impacts my health, how do I put up with it? If I have any whim, how do I gradually improve that? If I am diabetic, but I like sweeties, how do I stop progressively that? Diabetes is a dormant condition we inherit, just like a social inheritance, but how do I react to that condition and stop my profession from getting diabetes? It is to take care of myself, right? If I smoke because, at some point, someone taught me to smoke, how am I going to stop that? Because I am going to get pregnant, for example, if it is a woman, then everything is in the challenges.

How does change occur? Change occurs by resorting to different forms. Some go to university, others go to church and find guidance from someone who helps you, a senior man, for example, who knows how to tell you certain things and advises you. So, the Neighborhood Board is like a church that assembles; it is a place of discussion where ideas and points of view are exchanged to try to do something different from how it is done [traditionally], as there is a reality that is, the only way you change things is trying to do them differently so that, sometimes it does not work out, but other times it might work out. What is not viable is that you do things or nothing the same because the reality will stay the same, right? Those elements show how a neighborhood board can change the reality of a community; the first thing is understanding things. Why? For example, the sociologist, like the doctor, as we have said, looks at things that you [usually] do not see. The doctor does not have a stethoscope to listen to your heart; someone who knows has to come, stand

there, and learn how to listen to your heart, but he is already trained to listen to your heart. So, the sociologist comes to a community like that and sees things you do not necessarily know because you are used to seeing them daily. Do you understand me?

For example, I come to the community, and I like basketball. Still, I always see that hoop [in the street basketball court and coexists with the parking lot at the center of El Progreso], and when I look down, there is always a car, so I want to throw the ball, but the vehicle freaks me out. Exactly, because I say, “It will fall into the car,” so I have come several times, and I have found that the car is always there; I do not know whose car it is, by the way, and excuse me if the owner of the vehicle is here. So, what happens? It makes me very sad because I see the kids standing next to the car; they are throwing the ball, and I imagine what they feel about having that backboard and the basket where to throw the ball. Alternatively, they came here the other day, yesterday, Saturday, Sunday, sorry. And then they are playing there, in front of here, and they are throwing balls, and I say, “Oh, my goodness,” and the car does not move from there, and it was a Sunday; I mean, they needed to play, but they could not play. So maybe that is there forever. I do not know the car's owner, but as my mom says, those kids, "so they can be out there, it is better if they are here." So, what happens? That is a strategy to think to connect with the younger generations. You said in the interviews we did that precisely one of the challenges that your generation has is the dialogue with the younger generation, which they do not pay much attention [to all of you]; that is a generalized collective cry worldwide that everyone from the older generation is complaining to that: the younger generation does not respect the elders. So, the idea is to generate a strategy because if something is not working and one continues doing the same, that will not change. So, to get help from someone outside who comes and may look [things differently], where the community has not been there for a long time, and I say, well, but that would be the first step; I am not saying that that is going to solve the problem, but that it could unblock a possible communication that is not happening right now between one generation and another.

Someone told me, I think it was you, Junior, or Henry, who said to me that despite all that, when they have a game to play with a team from another neighborhood, I asked him, and

he told me, “That the young people do this and that,” and I said, so they do not respect it? He answered me with a “no, they respect it because, for example, when they are going to set up a game, they write their letter, and most of the time, when they are told a deadline, a deadline, 9:00 PM, they usually do not go beyond that time.”

So those are small opportunities for you to gain trust gradually. Look, I am going to give you another idea. This is a very clever town, why? Because they have lived with institutions that are constantly turning their backs on them. They come, look for votes, leave, and then they need to give them everything they promised during the campaign regarding employment structure. So, the Dominican people are very clever and always witty. When I gave you the informed consent form to sign, I saw that you were reluctant.
Moreover, it is true, you barely knew me, and I knew that was going to happen, and I said, I said it to Ramón, I told it to several of you, not to worry, that we were going to fill it out collectively, because collectively there is more trust, because, right? If one is going to fool you, if everyone gets together, it will not be that easy to fool everyone. So, unity is fundamental because unity is what enables the vulnerable to have some strength. If something defines poverty, they do not have all the power to achieve things. So, communities like Progress need to join forces, and a union of strength will not be completed by someone alone and isolated in an alley. The one who has the opportunity will do it for a series of things in life because they called him. After all, I met Henry; Henry invited his sister-in-law because Juan has been doing parallel activities for some time, a militancy that gives him the possibility of understanding, the same as Junior or because you studied at a university. These are privileges because one goes out there, and, unfortunately, people who have the same privileges will not have them; that is a right, and studying is a right, but here, not all people's rights are respected.

The Constitution of the Republic says everyone can study in secondary school and attend a university or a technical institute. Still, in reality, it is very different. That is written in multiple texts. So, when one has privileges like that that one can have, for example, the possibility of dedicating a night to thinking about oneself to serve others better, that is a privilege that one would seek to be by. Suppose I was given the possibility of studying

sociology. In that case, I carry within me, on my shoulders, a responsibility that I need to share so that what I know can be known by others and they can better act and interact. So, I felt committed to sharing with the Neighborhood Council of this sector, about which Fidias has spoken to me so much, this knowledge that I have. However, that knowledge is not something that I come and throw at you; it is things that I share [a first reflection, and then we rebuild it together]. The most important thing, the basis of adult pedagogy, is that you all have life experiences, [and that is with what] adult pedagogy [works] with. I come and say something, but then it echoes in your ears, and you try to understand it from your own life experience. If I say, for example, "yellow," there are those who see yellow as an eagle or a reference to the color of a baseball team, right? However, others, I do not know, see it as a banana or pumpkin, depending on how life has generated it for them. Some people see blue, and others see it as the sea.

I asked you in the interview what justice was. I came up with the sociological idea, and I was talking about social justice. However, since you had not studied sociology, you took it as what life has taught you: what justice is, which is the Judicial Power, justice, you understand? The police, the judge, La Victoria, the prison, the court, all that. So, everyone responds according to how life has allowed them to respond. So, what happens is that if we put all these experiences together in one place, I am going to learn from the community of El Progreso Jose's [extraordinary] expertise, which I still need to know. So, there is already a fertile exchange between sociology and life experience. So, we are going to work little by little on life experiences. Still, from the perspective of sociology and democracy, and finally, to conclude, I was telling you that living an experience is not enough. Moreover, there are three topics that I want to discuss with you, and that is how I conclude today's class.

The appreciation of the participants

Sixteen participants filled out the satisfaction survey about the workshop and the experience they had just had.

They all said they felt great, excellent, or sound. Regarding what they learned most in today's class, the participants answered essentially about the concepts in class. Thus (each vignette represents the answer of a person):

1. The idea of Community.
2. Democracy and justice.
3. Knowing more about the community.
4. The idea of (not legible) social, including the dignity of man.
5. Being kinder and more understanding.
6. That I can serve my community professionally and humanely.
7. That contributing to society is the most important thing.
8. Motivation.
9. Illegal.
10. The gift of giving, unity in the community.
11. Learn from what he tells me. I am silent. Very well, all.
12. Unity makes the vulnerable feel strong.
13. The professor's explanation.
14. Social justice: to each according to his needs.
15. That social justice is when one lives in an organized community.
16. Many things about the community.

The answers provided show that the participants worked on general concepts. According to their statements, learning abstract concepts such as dignity, democracy (in its local and participatory version and leadership dimension), community, social justice, and equity was complex. Due to our limited time, the objective of positioning these notions as an essential part of the workshop was well achieved.

In some cases, the response was limited to citing the notion, in other cases accompanying it with a definition, and in others only a definition of a concept that, although it was not explicitly worked on, was present in every one of the concepts and exercises carried out: solidarity. The unity and organization of the community were also expressed as one of the most important things to keep in mind throughout the project. In several cases, the importance of being understood was

expressed, and the idea of change was attainable. This was significant to accomplish because the tradition attributes national politics to the power to transform things.

The second objective sought, and no less important, was to motivate or maintain sufficient motivation in the participants to continue, despite the initial attitude of apathy, disbelief, or the inertia of some from the Neighborhood Council. As we have seen, from the first moment, it was a challenge in the previous phase of the workshops, and the first workshop would be crucial, as a kind of test of fire, life or death for the project. Moreover, the fact that some mentioned their motivation as the most important experience and the concepts already mentioned allows me to think that this indispensable objective for the project's continuity was achieved.

The question "What moment did you like the most?" investigated further how the participants related to the dynamics of the workshop, its procedures, and interactions, both in content and form. Here are the answers:

1. When we share a small amount of the qualities and contributions everyone can make to the community.
2. The professor is a good speaker and expositor and talks very well about the subject. He also gives excellent examples.
3. The exposition.
4. Social justice.
5. The way of explaining the talk.
6. I give that to my community, and I receive it back. The community is not all of us but those who relate to each other.
7. The dynamic helped me understand the intention of contributing to the community.
8. The talk.
9. Everything was exciting.
10. About social justice and democracy.
11. I learned. It had been a long time since I heard a class like that.
12. The dynamic of social understanding.
13. Learning. We can interact.
14. The excellent performance of the professor.
15. The explanation.

The responses provided by the participants left me with general satisfaction regarding the means and resources used as facilitators or mediators of the workshop. The sound ratings on the facilitator's pedagogical ability (the participants identify me as a teacher because that is how they introduced me) focus on linguistic skills (both in oratory and expression), as well as on the teaching skills used, with some of the participants emphasizing how the examples that accompanied the presentations facilitated the understanding of the topics addressed. In any case, if, in the first question, the participants insisted on what they had learned, in the second, the answers focus on the confirmation that they had achieved learning and felt good about it.

Another issue is the validation of knowledge by participants. It does not remain on a purely present intellectual level (its intelligibility), but it awakened a promise of future usefulness. In this case, validating a legitimate knowledge or project also arises from the participants' recognition that the project is worthwhile. This is what, taking up the idea of the illusion worked on by Bourdieu, induces the social agent to play the game, to invest and involve, from a belief of faith, in the game of the project and the promises of return that it has for each participant.

A fourth question, “Anything you felt uncomfortable about today?” attempted to make an inventory of things that perhaps did not flow, of which, as a facilitator, I was not aware. Here are the different positions:

1. The length of the class.
2. It lasted a long time, and I could not arrive early.
3. Nothing.
4. Nothing.
5. The time we arrived early.
6. Not at all.
7. The delay of the majority.
8. No, Nothing.
9. Nothing so far.
10. No, everything is fine.
11. No.
12. I have no complaints.

13. N/A.
14. Nothing.
15. No.

The time issue was undoubtedly the excellent material challenge of the first workshop. As many describe in the fourth question, as well as in the fifth that we will see below, the issue of punctuality of some of the attendees made the start of the workshop delayed by approximately half an hour. Therefore, it was extended an hour and a half later, with the conclusion of the same arriving until almost nine at night. Without a doubt, it is too late for the responsibilities of the participants to be fulfilled. We would review this element significantly.

Recommendations or comments from participants to improve the class

1. Start on the agreed date, even if not all participants are there.
2. Establish a fixed time to end since some may get desperate.
3. Have the participants interact more.
4. We continue.
5. Be punctual, and arrive early.
6. Manage time better. Participants should be more punctual.
7. Start with whoever is there.
8. Still waiting.
9. Have everyone play their role.
10. More interaction from participants.
11. Only some things are perfect.
12. No.
13. Have the participants be more punctual.
14. Let us start on time.
15. Everything is fine.
16. N/a.

In addition to the time as a factor to review, a final observation, which some participants pointed out, was to make the class more interactive.

The issue of time was decisive in not being able to have all the required interaction. Despite being a conversation, perhaps because it was the first meeting where many new things were met

for the first time, including the facilitator, the participants assumed an attitude of presence and participation, although some in a passive way. A significant review point is to reevaluate the dynamics of the subsequent sessions.

Closing remarks:

From these first moments of the first workshop, I quickly confirmed that the educator's use of sociology is not reduced to simple measurement instruments. First of all, sociology contributes to the enrichment of the educator's sensitivity and praxis concerning the different sociological components that occur in the place of learning, transformed into a field of action of human beings with stories and conditions, some common and others more personal. However, all of these factors impact the attitude and disposition of the individual regarding the dynamics and learning of the workshop. Thus, for example, sociology helped me remain vigilant regarding the intellectual dispositions of the participants (possessed vocabulary, known references, underlying cultural perspectives). However, it also helped me not to take for granted any prejudices, either famous or of my academic ethos.

It is one of the significant principles of sociology: the reflexive vigilance over our history and points of view so that they do not enter into observation and contaminate it. In the fieldwork, everything was generated from the critical practice itself, but above all, self-criticism, trying to be intellectually honest, submitting everything to the verification of the facts, as if every minute that passed since I began the fieldwork informed the next, and where confirmations, modifications, surprises were already occurring (and would undoubtedly occur), or, in some cases, elements that I had not even imagined could appear.

Chapter 6: Workshop 2: Reconstructing community knowledge.

The second workshop seeks to learn about the census findings conducted by SIUBEN and verify them by cross-referencing this information with the project participants' experiential knowledge. Here, I aim to establish a tripartite conversation: the statistics, the participants' experiential knowledge, and the sociological expertise that I brought to arrive at a result as close as possible quantitatively, dynamically, and conceptually to the state of the community.

As the main complaint of several of the participants about the first workshop was the lateness of some (which made the end of the seminar very late at night), I asked several of the most committed participants to encourage their colleagues to arrive punctually on time.

The strategy worked because, at the beginning of the session, there were approximately 14 participants present before the start. We started earlier than the first workshop but had to start 15 minutes after the indicated time. There, I also understood that, although it is undeniable that there is a lot of laxity in the face of extraordinary commitments such as the project, it is no less accurate that people of the type that the participants have many responsibilities that imply being understanding of reality and reaching a balance between rigor and flexibility.

In addition, the SIUBEN data would be presented for this second workshop, which created great curiosity and expectation among the participants. Something important to highlight is that the atmosphere reigning among the participants differed from those usually receiving a social assistance institution.

The participants knew that it was a presentation of the results of the Census carried out months before, so there was an intentional attitude of being present according to the project's

planned criteria. That was already an achievement in itself: moving from the traditional clientelism with which the population approaches the State institutions to move on to a conversation where both parties could establish a dialogue based on each of the resources that each party manages. SIUBEN provides quantitative data, and the Residents' Board delivers the knowledge from life experience in the territory.

Like the previous time, the session began with a brief religious prayer. I also presented the workshop program, describing its content, moments, and objectives. The focus of the second workshop would be the presentation of the data collected by SIUBEN on the community and, in a second moment, the participants' reactions to it. A third moment would be the distribution of two work topics in groups to approach the problems of the community in a more precise way. But before, we had to return to the concepts worked on in the first workshop to revisit the notions treated during the first workshop and generate an environment to reintroduce them into the dynamics of the project.

It is necessary to understand that the project continues to be a marginal element in the lives of the participants, and a thousand and one situations and concerns happened in a week where the project is almost something close to being anecdotal for the participants and their daily hustle and bustle.

Reviewing First Workshop

It was essential to reiterate the sequence of the workshops and how the third day was part of the five. We were in the second, where after seeing in the first the fundamental concepts of the project, such as the notions of community, dignity, social justice, and local democracy, we would

then stop to learn about the social problems of the community of El Progreso. In this, we would know the essentials of social sciences through statistical methods, indicators, variables, the crossing of variables, and how the state feeds on statistics to carry out its public poverty alleviation policies. However, we would also see the crucial importance of the community having these statistics at hand and the importance of analyzing them in light of their own life experiences in the day-to-day lives of their community members.

The third session would be dedicated to dealing with the problems in groups to construct a diagnosis of the main issues; the fourth session would be in charge of organizing social action after the diagnosis with its possible solutions; The fifth would be a dialogue with state agencies, as a first test of the agency capabilities of the Residents' Council. We would end there with a general assessment of the overall work of the five workshops.

In the beginning, I made a small announcement that the next workshop date had to be moved to Tuesday instead of Monday because Monday was a holiday. I wanted to hold the third workshop within a week to maintain the enthusiastic interest we were experiencing and reduce any possible distractions. I was explicit; the participants understood and approved the measure together.

Then, we moved on to the notions specifically. When I started with the idea of community, one of the participants immediately remembered the group exercise of exchanging attributes. Interestingly, the collective memory began with the most concrete and least abstract of the previous day. I insisted that to ratify what the participant expressed, what makes a community is the exchanges between its members; it is not just sharing a territory. And that the quality of a community and its coexistence has to do with the quality of the exchanges based on respect and reciprocity.

We moved on to the idea of dignity. One participant intervened there, saying, "It was an intrinsic principle that each person has and that we all have it because we are human." And I added that it is through social recognition that this dignity takes on a concrete dimension. I cited the case of how this condition is inalienable to human beings, which means that it is never lost. And even with those who commit faults, the State cannot act with the same yardstick as it penalizes. That is what democratic institutions are for, and the treatments that try to translate into justice, retaliation, or revenge should not be allowed, but rather justice and humanization approaches. One of the participants said that the law of talion no longer exists. We all agreed.

For the notion of social justice, it was similar. The audience itself remembered. One of the participants gave a concrete example to define it, from the principle of equity or of "providing each person according to their needs." He gave the example of a blind person needing more help than someone sighted. The participant aimed to name the problem within the community itself, using the topography of the place as an example. I was delighted to hear how the participant gave practical examples from abstract concepts.

When mentioning equity, one of the participants even proposed a political measure applicable to the central government to define the notion: it is a contradiction, the participant stated, for public officials who manage public education to have their children in private schools.

For the concept of democracy, one of the shyest participants in the group said that participating in community affairs is an essential element of any local democracy. I congratulated the participant for having hit the center of the definition on the first try. People's participation is the most critical thing in a democracy. Then, I also congratulated everyone, in general, for a perfect balance and answers to each of the questions I asked about the previous workshop.

We then moved on to SIUBEN's participation, which would be the focus of workshop number two.

The importance of knowing the community

Before presenting the survey results, I briefly explained the importance of the survey within the project in general and of that second session in particular. I always thought it was vital that the participants were permanently aware of the logical sequence of the effort to generate the feeling that we were gradually learning. It was necessary to name at each moment what we were learning and generally experiencing collectively. It was simple: SIUBEN collects information as a State, that is, a public body that will always be there, and passes it on to the government, which is the one that executes the policies.

The State is the figure that legally represents the public force, protecting the vulnerable against possible abuses; it is the one that organizes society with an apparatus of institutions and laws. The government is the one that implements a budget with public policies, and, in addition, it is the guarantor with which the regulations are complied[25]. I introduce Dario, a senior officer of SIUBEN, who addresses those present with the following words:

[25] In this way, the participants could learn at any time about concepts we had already discussed or were new but necessary to understand the workshop sessions as if they were a glossary of additional concepts. The same practical procedure for the facts we were operating was added pertinently, pulled by the need to use them at specific moments. I must confess that some were planned to be touched upon as planned collateral effects, such as that of the State and government. Others would unexpectedly appear during the different sessions.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I thank Juan Miguel for inviting me because the truth is that as a human being and as a public servant, both Raúl [SIUBEN's junior officer who accompanied us that night] *and I see the point in being a public servant with these things. So tonight, I want to do what I want to see done in society with the image of SIUBEN. Although we are an institution that operates with public resources, with resources that the government provides because it is the administrator of the state, we have to distance ourselves from everything that is government; why? For a simple reason, its essence is social inclusion. We have to do with policies, not politics, and that is why when SIUBEN carries out its operations to go out into the field and gather information, as was the case here last year, we come with a form that has a series of contents, a series of approaches to aspects that have to do with the living conditions of the people who live there, who are part of this sector. In that sense, I was pleased when Juan Miguel spoke about the issue of social justice and dignity because it reveals the situation in which the population here in El Progreso lives."*

In his speech, Dario spoke about the living conditions of the people, but he also insisted on the community approach. It was a perfect introduction because, from a third party, the legitimacy of the project is strengthened. Above all, it is an official entity that speaks and mobilizes the resources to carry out a census.

Then, the junior officer of SIUBEN, Raúl, comes into action to present the results. The speaker goes straight to the numbers and begins with demographic information:

> "In the survey, some 906 people were scored, some 501 women, 55.3%, and 405 men, 44.7%. At the household level, 328 households, the majority, 244, 74%, were headed by women, and 84 households, 25.6%, were headed by men. Some relevant data is that 7% of the population has not been declared in the Civil Registry, that is, the Board. And there is also a percentage of 11% of the migrant population concerning the total number of registered inhabitants."

From the start, this introduction already established three critical areas of work. Firstly, more women than men were present during the census, and more houses with women as heads of household than men could be visited. That is to say, women are more present in the homes than men during working hours, but they also live less alone (or, better said, more accompanied) as evidence that their homes were the majority of those that could be surveyed, that is to say, that there were people in them on SIUBEN passed in working hours.

Secondly, starting from this, the female presence in the community was becoming visible: women are not only heads of households, but their homes provide shelter to others, in a proportion three times greater than in the case of men, and where 40% of those surveyed are single-person households, that is to say, they live alone.

Two more elements were extracted from the silence by the survey from highly vulnerable and voiceless populations: the undocumented: 7% of the population surveyed said they were not declared in the Civil Registry, that is to say, they do not have legal papers, as was the case of the deceased older woman that was already mentioned earlier. The other highly vulnerable population was the immigrant population, essentially of Haitian origin, which represented 11% of the total inhabitants of El Progreso.

These three demographic categories were fundamental to bring to light. It raised awareness among the participants as the junior officer presented the facts rigorously, with due attention to the existence of these figures and, therefore, realities. According to some commentary a participant made privately during this part of the session, it was the first time the participants suddenly knew their community in depth. We were attending a kind of film screening about the community in which they lived, in which each step of a slide was like a scene with thought-provoking numbers, sometimes surprising ones. A great moment of discovery, or, instead, self-discovery, in which each unearthing attracts the participants, especially that which provides certainty about an idea previously only perceived.

Something was fascinating about the moment of encountering the truth, and this was confirmed by the reactions of the participants who followed each information presented very attentively, with gestures of approval in most cases, smiles in others, comments among them sometimes, and expressions that ratified or at some point provided some precision of what was socialized. There was never any boredom or indifference; throughout the presentation, there was active participation from people who followed each figure and explanation provided.

An example of this beautiful encounter between reality perception and the precision provided by the figures was when the subject of housing ownership in the sector was addressed. According to official data, 68% of the inhabitants of El Progreso live in rented houses. The participants looked at each other with gestures of approval, many saying, “Of course!” or referring to a companion next to them as “I told you so!”. It was like the voices they were waiting for to be said and heard. At times, it was like a political meeting where numbers revealed the social injustices they lived in, but no one talked about them.

An exceptional and critical moment occurred when SIUBEN addressed the subject of overpopulation in the community. According to the figures provided in the information collected, almost 20% of people live in very crowded conditions in their homes (13% between 2.5 and 4 people per room, and 6% with four or more people per room). I made two interventions here. The first was a critique of the concept of overcrowding by room and not by square footage of the house. Considering that rooms can have different sizes, two in a 16 square meter room differ from two in an 8 square meter one.

Likewise, a 2-room house of 60 square meters differs from a 3-room house of 50. The imprecision of the data needed to be highlighted because, although it provided a serious and alarming approximation, it did not tell the whole truth of a reality that was undoubtedly more complex. There, we saw the difference that can sometimes appear between statistical reality and actual reality, an element very present in sociology courses at the university. I addressed it in the workshop with the participants' support, especially for SIUBEN's benefit, which reacted positively to the criticism that showed this imprecision in its measurement instrument.

The same thing happened when I pointed out that, in addition to overpopulation inside the houses, there was also the issue of overpopulation in public spaces. Living in overcrowded conditions usually means using part of the nearest public space as part of your private space. For example, in front of houses in Dominican neighborhoods, there is typically a gallery where people take out their chairs and rocking chairs to sit and get fresh air, talk, and even drink coffee or rum.

But the situation in El Progreso is so particular, due to its topology and population density, that the distance separating a house from the one in front can be one to two meters at best in the most densely populated areas, which are the majority in the barrio. This means that, in addition, most open spaces, which are multipurpose, serve at the same time - and often simultaneously - as

a parking lot for vehicles, a basketball court, a public park where people sit, play domino, or even serve as a terrace where street food businesses set up tables.

Again, with the participant's support, I point out that SIUBEN also needs to consider this contextual variable when evaluating the degree of overcrowding of the people and families they study. When pointing out the case, the reaction of both SIUBEN officials and participants was to agree on the need for both the public space surrounding a home, as well as the square footage of the homes themselves, also to be taken into account by state agencies when determining the degree of overcrowding of people. I insisted that this would also refresh the perspective of the analysis of a community, integrating the variable of "community overcrowding," which would no longer have the individual or the households as the unit of measurement but the community itself as a set of shared spaces and dynamics that directly involve the personal and social life of people in an inseparable way. This, I emphasized, could perhaps improve the paradigm of using public policies towards a more social perspective and, therefore, a more complete one for people and households.

The same would happen when addressing the issue of the materials used in the houses. In the SIUBEN questionnaire, the respondent looks at the roof, the floor, the walls, and the material they are built with. Historically, the houses in the neighborhoods, including El Progreso, were constructed with rudimentary materials (stone walls, zinc roofs, and often dirt floors) due to the meager economic resources of their original owners.

Today, housing conditions have been improving, given the economic evolution of those original owners and their descendants mentioned above, as well as the products of migration and other financial factors. They are now made or transformed with cement roofs, walls, and polished cement or ceramic floors. The SIUBEN results say that 90% of the houses are made of solid materials. However, while it is true that this implies an improvement in the safety of these homes

(especially in the face of rain and atmospheric phenomena such as cyclones, so common in the Caribbean where the Dominican Republic is located), and this, of course, implies improved living conditions for the inhabitants of these homes, it is no less accurate that these improvements do not necessarily talks about the actual conditions of poverty of these people.

As I stated to the assembly, these houses are like this due to their owners, not to the living conditions of their tenants, who may have good conditions in the house but not have food on the table or live with the uncertainties of not having health coverage, employment or an adequate fixed income. Participants bounded their heads as, to what I have understood, signs of approval to what I was saying.

Darío, the senior officer of SIUBEN, intervened, recognizing the shared perspectives as fundamental contributions to reviewing the information collection instruments and the reading and analysis framework. He confirms what I was saying, specifying that, for example, the overpopulation indicator allows for predicting the possible degree of expansion of a contagious disease, such as during the COVID pandemic.

However, a pandemic does not stop at one home. If the degree of community overcrowding can also be accounted for, the measuring instrument can improve the accuracy and scope of predictions. One of the participants took a turn and talked about the community parking problem as an example of urban planning issues.

At this point, we all contributed with an analysis in which the quantitative started the debate; the sociological perspective provided a critical reflection that seemed timely and helpful, and the participants completed the social inquiry with their validations from their own experiences. A reality seen from above and by standardized knowledge is refined by social criticism, which in

turn is verified by the people who approve and assume as a problem what was previously a partial statistical truth or did not exist as a problem for the public authorities.

Another relevant element within the calamities addressed in the SIUBEN presentation was the access to water for human consumption inside homes. Only 50% of the houses have access to drinking water inside their homes, and the rest look for it from public water taps located in different places in the community. This was a fact that affected us all. Even now, half of the households still have to carry water to wash, clean, cook, etc. This was a moment of shock, where poverty was seen through a graph in its crude numerical reality. But that also educates us that shock makes us understand that poverty is not a fiction or a fact that, by becoming familiar with it, would represent a reality that we increasingly repress from our consciences.

On the contrary, it was the moment in which we should take advantage to strengthen the need for a Neighborhood Council and the commitment of its members to help maintain its agency with the public authorities. Dario intervenes and says that in addition to the effort of carrying water, which I noted is usually the responsibility of women, it also involves contaminating the essential liquid for a healthy life. Two participants tell stories about the different strategies their neighbors use to store water and the sources from which they obtain it. One feels that the exchange of information guarantees being at the forefront of knowledge on the issue, and that provides security when it comes to telling the truth, or at least an approximation as close to the truth as possible, when the exercise is done in a community, with the possibility of questioning the other and rectifying, ratifying or disagreeing with the information presented.

As for household equipment, only 2.4% have essential appliances (stove, refrigerator, washing machine, television) and modern appliances (computer, microwave, etc.). Almost 80% have only necessary appliances, and 37.5% only have some. The SIUBEN officer points out that

female-headed households are usually better equipped with appliances than male-headed ones. A participant intervenes, saying, "Men do not worry about their homes." A smile appears among all those present, one of those that arises from the truth that has just been revealed for the first time in a group and that everyone more or less knew about it.

The dynamic was dazzling the participants. We were all very interested, to the point that the following dialogue took place, which has a fabulous educational pertinence:

> **Participant:** Will all this information be available?
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez: …** this information is already a public service; we will work with it, and this is a summary. It is a summary because the questionnaire has 11 pages and many questions…
>
> **Raúl (SIUBEN):** 66 questions. We are showing them only some today.
>
> **Participant:** In summary, could it be had?
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Sure, of course. That is what we are going to work on. This is part of the community. The idea is to see how the interaction works, the public service, which returns to the citizens the resources that the citizens use to finance this research, which is taxes. You know that we pay taxes through taxes based on what we earn or spend. Every time we call from a cell phone, pay for electricity or a soft drink, a tax goes to the state, and the state distributes it to the police, education, a hospital, and then SIUBEN. That information is available to the community, and the community can enrich it with their own lives, like what we are doing here.
>
> **Darío (SIUBEN):** Raúl and I, any person you identify as a public servant, are your employees.

The participants felt the information was valuable and wanted to ensure it was available to guide social action in the Neighborhood Council.

Then, the issue of age was addressed. The average age of women is 35, and men's is 31. It is a relatively young and woman population—55.3% women and 44.7% men. A curious fact arises here that mobilizes my interest. 17% of women are 60 or older (compared to 10% of men). So, I intervene and invite everyone to think about the possibility of a line of action for vulnerable people. A woman, in a context of poverty and aging, has a triple condition of vulnerability. Being a woman in a context of male domination, when added to coming from a context of poverty, usually implies that life has been arduous, especially in domestic chores. The case of carrying water comes to mind as an example among many others of how hard life is in such conditions when the woman is the one who washes and irons clothes, cleans the house, cooks, scrubs, takes care of the children and elderly, etc. And if we add to that that salaries still preserve a significant difference between men and women, especially in those economic strata with very few job qualifications accredited by school diplomas, the conditions of economic mobility tend to be very low throughout a lifetime. Of course, I insist, the memory of the case of the undocumented woman who died leaves me with scars, and I use it as perhaps the most complete example to describe the state of vulnerability of extreme poverty.

At that point, we moved on to the topic of health, where indicators of chronic illnesses among the residents of El Progreso are cited. 17.1% report suffering from hypertension, 14.8% report suffering from some vision problem, 6.7% from respiratory conditions, and 6.3% from diabetes. These conditions imply long-term treatments and hospitalizations with repercussions that can be fatal. The figure is high and alarms all the participants. People shudder and remain silent or lower their heads. I knew of several cases of people present with people in their homes suffering from these elements. It must be said that the problem here is the treatments. It is impossible to afford

many of them. Not only the medications but even the simple transportation fee or the time to visit or accompany a relative to the hospital is a commodity that is scarce among the participants and the residents of El Progreso. These elements are not often mentioned in other socioeconomic strata, but they are crucial in a context of poverty like that of the neighborhood.

As we continue the presentation, graphics show the communal face of poverty and vulnerability. Only 35.6% obtained secondary education, and 19% received a university education. Thirteen percent need to learn to read and write, and 20% do not have any digital culture.

In terms of social problems, 9.3% of adolescents from 12 to 18 years old declared that they are or have been pregnant. This, of course, generated another commotion, with a great sigh among those present. 8.8% reported having been assaulted at least once. And 5.1% more than one.

Regarding the general condition of poverty, SIUBEN says that 21% of households are in a state of structural poverty, 47.6% at a medium level, and 34% at the highest level. The participants' reactions were generally skeptical. SIUBEN admits that the measurement indicators are fallible. From 66 variables, 17 keys are taken to measure structural characteristics (housing, education, access to essential services, and household composition).

In the last part of the intervention, SIUBEN officials answered some questions from participants and clarified some essential elements of the issue of structural poverty. The junior SIUBEN official explains that they choose the beneficiaries rather than the eligible ones, that is, those households in a long-term poverty situation from which it is not easy to escape. For example, when measuring the structural poverty index of a population or territory, factors that can disappear or reappear with relative ease are not considered. He gives the example of employment and says that a family can be registered as having a job because, at the time of the census, there was one;

however, that job, two weeks after the census, can be lost and then find themselves without that source of income, and also unprotected by the State. Because the condition of poverty assumes employment as a figure of precarious duration, they prefer not to use it as a trust.

That allowed me to expand and address the issue of the precarious status of life that poverty provides in many dimensions of life. Thus, for example, people living in neighborhoods tend to have jobs with a low labor hierarchy or accredited qualifications. This implies that they can be replaced with relative ease, and the demand for employment in that range of functions and work is usually much greater than the available labor supply. Therefore, there is a lot of worker turnover in those strata. This situation of job insecurity is aggravated in a country like the Dominican Republic, where the union membership rate is meager, and employers have very little respect for the labor rights of associations and the protection of workers. Add to this vulnerability the factors of fluctuations in the economy, such as inflation, to which nominal wages are not usually indexed, or recessions, which cause economic activity to be cut back.

Most of the first jobs typically sacrificed are in this socioeconomic and professional stratum. As the junior SIUBEN official had already expressed, the same happens with events, specific situations such as the Pandemic, or even ordinary electoral or economic cycles. January, for example, is a good example that participants understand because they live it after December when there is a lot of economic activity[26]. Economic activity slows in January, and money becomes scarcer, especially for the neighborhood populations.

[26] The 13th salary is a legal bonus for workers officially registered as such, usually around 43% of the total number of workers. The others, 56.7%, belong to the informal sector, do not receive social security coverage, and sometimes, not even the 13th salary.

This was a significant moment because we were genuinely explaining the engine room of poverty and its reproduction. The topic is accessible because the participants are economic actors who know from their experience the realities, concepts, and processes we describe. We were genuinely talking about conditions such as justifying why community protection was influential in the face of economic vulnerability and the absence or deficiency of the State in fulfilling its social obligations.

It was very noteworthy because when addressing this issue, the two SIUBEN officials told us that they, as SIUBEN, were there because they wanted the community to know that they were present, accompanying the Neighborhood Board in its efforts to defend the community and the most vulnerable in it. One of the participants intervenes in this purpose.

> **Participant:** "Sometimes you hear the government's statistics of the [Central] bank: "There are 3 million people out of poverty". It isn't easy to understand; I have only begun to understand it. I know it with that explanation: I receive a salary, but if I had an extra from my employer, that is, compensation for something, I would change my rank due to the compensation they give me [in a given year]. And now I understand why it says, "3 million people left poverty. […] Now I can understand it…"
>
> **Raúl (Siuben):** "That is how it is. Briefly, those lines are a line. Two lines are calculated for the case of monetary poverty, one that they call extreme poverty; that is, they take a series of essential foods, measure their price, and say that the household that earns less than that costs so much is monetary poor, they make another line that is food plus other products that are not food and that is the general or moderate poverty line, that is, who is above the food line, but below the food line plus other essential products is poor, moderate and who is above that second line is not inadequate. You fall, I don't know, RD$5 above that line. You transcended".

Juan Miguel Pérez: [those measurements] they are approximations…

So, I took the floor to close the SIUBEN session with a summary reflection on the limits and benefits of the statistics that we had just learned:

Juan Miguel Pérez: "It is about trying to quantify. As you can see, many elements escape everything the El Progreso sector experiences. That is to say, for example, I repeat that the issue of overcrowding is not an issue that is included there, but it is an issue that is structurally difficult to change […]. And well, I thank Darío and Raúl for participating in this presentation. They will continue with us, that is, they are accompanying us, which is different from coming to make a presentation. In other words, SIUBEN is involved in this project. They want it to be successful because statistics are socially constructed. That is the idea you can use, that the people who live in those statistics can inform them.

Not necessarily, gentlemen; one living a reality understands it completely; that is why breaking down these elements helps to recompose a little of one's vision and strengthens the possibility of social action. That is to say, it is not the same thing for you to go, for example, in the case of lack of documentation than for you to go to the Civil Registrar and say, gentlemen, in our community, there are 6% of residents who do not have their documents. Could an operation be carried out now for the community to solve this situation? That is serious. Yes, that is strong for the Neighborhood Council, the community, and the Civil Registrar. If we are talking about 800 families or households, we are talking about 6% being approximately 48 families with a situation of that type. Of course, we are talking in numerical terms, but it is an idea that I am giving you so that you can see that it is possible".

At that point, the idea of the workshop work as a tripartite division of work on statistics had worked:

1. SIUBEN: official knowledge

2. Sociological perspective: critical knowledge (of categories, dynamics, and the silences of statistics).

3. Community represented by the Participants: experiential knowledge, which, in light of what they heard and in dialectical dialogue, validated the integrity of what was said or concluded after their participation.

But even so, it must be said that participation during the presentation, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, has still to make its way. The participants were more attentive to learning and receiving, and there was still no great debate. They limited themselves to consuming and processing what they received, asking questions, and validating.

It was now time to move on to a third moment where we would touch on the topics that could be addressed in the task that we would carry out in groups of two. It was the moment when stopping at each problem would bring about lively participation from the people, with the wealth of their knowledge mobilized in each intervention.

Qualitative analysis (community and sociology revisit data)

At the beginning of the third part of this second workshop, I told them I would conduct the section based on the information they, themselves, the participants, had given me during the interviews. I explained to them that I needed help finding a consensus when I asked them what the three main problems of the community were in each of their opinions. Some seemed to be shared, but from one interview to the following, very different issues appeared, and this was normal, as I explained to them, because they were individual interviews.

In this workshop segment, I pointed out that the idea was to turn these judgments into discussion, build an objective view of them, and extract a consensus, taking advantage of the strength of synergy the Neighborhood Council is capable of. In the end, we would organize the participants into groups of two who would be in charge of working on each of the topics chosen by the group to draw up a specific diagnosis of the problem (context, cause, consequences) and, at the same time develop possible solutions that we would present together in workshop three.

I proposed that I take the initiative to summarize what was said in the interviews by rubrics or sector of action, and the idea was that we could react to them.

Security:

I opened the session by confirming with the participants that there were no significant security problems. One of the participants questioned me and said: “It's not that there aren't any; it's that there weren't…” Two other people ask me and tell me that, yes, the problem exists, and they cite several cases of muggings, house robberies, etc. Fidias goes on to say that he has recently witnessed people who gather at weekends to drink alcohol and that, on a couple of occasions, he has seen them shoot in the air in a festive but hazardous and suspicious atmosphere. One of the participants says that the recent insecurity is precisely due to external factors that reach the neighborhood at party times. The exchange provided some details, but there seems to be a consensus that, although a generally safe atmosphere prevails in the neighborhood, measures must be taken due to the recent rise of some worrying events.

Contingency plan:

As I have stated previously, the complex structure of public spaces in El Progreso represents an absolute labyrinth for anyone not from the area. And a real problem for any emergency that may arise. The cases of ambulance arrival have already been duly pointed out as complex. So, I introduced the topic because, in addition, it can generate an exciting process of first works, and that is crucial to encourage the members of the Neighborhood Council to do things, and above all so that their work can be made visible to the community. Here, I reproduce what I said and the brief exchange so that a sense of the degree of situation that exists in this regard can be obtained:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** […] another security problem I noticed coming from outside, but that is perhaps important to point out. Above all, because we recently had an earthquake. […] it is the way to point out the possibility of a security plan in the event of a contingency. That is to say, you go to the places, and there is a sign that says "meeting point," but it is also for any event, such as a rescuer getting in here. It is not easy to get in or out either, so that is a course of action, to adequately indicate where the exits and entrances to the neighborhood are, […] to be able to generate the possibility and the design of a contingency plan, that is, an emergency plan. Gentlemen, but don't you remember the floods that happened here?
>
> **Participant 1:** In November.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Exactly, well, no one would have imagined that that would happen, and yet it happened in the country, and there were deaths.
>
> **Participant 2:** An emergency issue could be a fire.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Also, if there is a fire. That is to say, the firefighters.

Participant 1: It would be a manageable challenge to get in here. But, for example, with a hydrant. It could be a solution when the truck came on Saturday. Well, luckily, he went to clean, and the pump arrived. It didn't want to turn on, and he had to take the truck out and bring another one. But imagine everything in a moment of emergency...

Juan Miguel Pérez: So […] Signage and fire prevention plans, floods, earthquakes, ambulance.

Participant 3: It's good to inform people. As president of the neighborhood council, I wanted to do this. What happened is that people here are very comfortable. I even left the money there. During my presidency, we would buy a pump, especially for the cistern there.

Juan Miguel Pérez: The water?
Participant 3: Yes, I dug a pipe up to where the light pole is in the roundabout. There, I was going to put a pipe with a hose that would be bought with that pump. […] Three people from here from this sector opposed it; the three could have been my mother.

Juan Miguel Pérez: That's fine. That's part of life. Participant 3: And I left it like that. And the money from the bomb stayed here.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Remember what we said the first time. When one exercises leadership, one has to arm oneself with patience because, many times, that is precisely what happens: one wants to contribute to people who are the first to oppose.

The exchanges mobilize people and their memories. They allow me to learn about the Neighborhood Council's tasks and difficulties.

<u>Social order, concord, and vicinity</u>

Essentially, the topic centered around the noise pollution from the music from some neighbors, especially young people, played at all hours and daily in the neighborhood. The situation is complex. I began by summarizing what the participants expressed in the initial individual interviews. There, I said that the important thing was to develop a strategy that would respond to that reality. The first strategy in this regard was to have a plan within ourselves, that is, between the members of the Neighborhood Council. The first strategy was to understand these young people and their behavior to design a pedagogical action plan for the issue that could bear fruit.

One participant started the debate by saying that the music and the problems come from visitors from outside who arrive with their vehicles and horns. Another participant spoke about his case: a neighbor who, on Sundays, turns up the music at a high volume and does not let us rest or even watch television. Annoyed, he exclaims: “Respect for the rights of others is peace,” alluding to that famous phrase by the Mexican politician Benito Juárez.

I said that it was ok to complain about it. It is even a just right. However, I repeat, the first response must be to understand why each actor plays loud music and learn how to design strategies with each one. Few participants claim indignation. I said it was legitimate, but here, I explained, the first reflex is to try to understand the other by putting ourselves in their shoes. Then I said that the exciting thing would be to listen to them. Unfortunately, I pressed that they were not here with us. So, let us try to imagine what they would have said about it. That is an essential element: Knowing how to listen to the voices of those who are not present or represented and trying to understand their reasons and rights, referring to those young people.

There, I made a brief aside about how sociology addresses our relationship with problems. When we talk about a topic, we are not just talking about the subject only, but primarily, we are

about our relationship with that topic. It was a way of explaining our biases about a specific topic, where instead of understanding the object or subject in question, its history, circumstances, and context, we rush to judge it. The significant contribution of sociology here is precisely to have the most neutral approach possible to our object of analysis.

Dominant culture in the Dominican Republic, as well in many other places conditioned by capitalist dynamics, tends to place all responsibility for a person's actions on the individual who carries them out, and we tend to forget, gloss over, or underestimate the social factors behind people's decisions. I shared with those present that, in a context of poverty, where many actors have had a tough life, even at an early age, like the young people of El Progreso, they engage in practices that respond to that hardship of life as survival strategies in their contexts. Thus, for example, the consumption of loud music by young people in marginal conditions has many possible interpretations from the anthropological point of view: many of them may have moments of leisure because they may be unemployed, for instance, and decide to listen to music in the neighborhood “to kill” that unoccupied time when they don't have anything to do and do know what to do but put music. Or they have a lot of work and use those moments to rest after long work days: the harder their journeys are, the more they look for loud music with violent lyrics to match their rough moods. Loud music is also usually the protest anthem that these young people sing, and the more it is heard, the more pleased they may be to raise their voices to make their presence felt in a society that usually ignores it.

Without a doubt, there may be a lot or a little provocation, but one must also think, I told the participants, about the causes behind such behavior. Although many of the adults in the community complain, any solution must first start, paradoxically, with a particular general empathy towards these young people and a pedagogical approach, where we first understand them

and then design a plan to accompany them and negotiate a comprehensive and dignified way out of the situation for everyone.

Regarding the situation of the young people who want to play basketball in the parking lot and whose sporting activity bothers many residents, I want to point out two essential things. First, young people of that age need to practice physical activity. Their body asks for it. We were all young at some point, and we knew that physical activity was an almost physiological need of our body at that stage. The same goes for having fun. And these young people do not have any other accessible resources for distraction and physical exercise. They were born and raised in harsh conditions of misery. In addition, it is a sport with many educational possibilities, which can prevent many things and keep them away from vices, addictions, and criminality. I explained to them that I had witnessed how these young people would stand in front of the basket and the backboard when vehicles below them prevented them from playing. Then, they would mime as if they were playing. That is, they would go back to a game without the ball. I gave them an example: imagine that you are starving every afternoon and live next to a pizzeria. I gave the example by imitating the young boy passing by the pizzeria. A great burst of laughter occurred among the participants, which allowed me to see that they were at least understanding what was initially a cold attitude, even silence. It was another point of view than usual. We agreed to think more carefully about it in the homework assigned by groups of two.

Health:

When I opened this section, I pointed out that chronic diseases are also a matter of interest to the Neighbors' Council. Although diseases of these qualities often respond to genetic or biological factors specific to the individual, it is no less accurate that the social part has a vital role

in the propensity for these diseases to develop. I gave an example to the participants, whether it is due to the context, for example, respiratory and its relationship with the quality of the air that people in a particular community breathe, or diabetes and its relationship with the quality of food, poverty can be a decisive factor when a chronic condition appears. Poverty can prevent a condition from being detected and treated in time, such as, for example, vision problems or cancer itself in its different variants.

I gave the example of cancer, which, although it was not included in the SIUBEN survey, I was interested in knowing the community situation and appealed to collective knowledge. Curiously, there was no significant reaction to the question. One participant intervened, saying there were no major cases in the community. I reiterated the possibility that a localized inventory of severe health issues could be established and that a medical survey could be generated to detect diseases, chronic conditions, or procedures before state agencies provide aid for treatments that may be expensive. Someone suggested the possibility of house-to-house visits to those cases they already know. That was an excellent idea that could lead to disclosing other cases unknown to the Neighborhood Council members.

The issue of teenage pregnancy was also addressed, which, according to SIUBEN statistics, affects almost 10% of the adolescents in the sector. There was no significant reaction here. Time was moving forward, and we had to speed up, but I did not have enough time to stop to explain the situation. In the Dominican Republic, adolescents who become pregnant are often mistreated by their families despite their vulnerable situation. It was important to me to be sensitized about the subject, but I needed time to address this, which I did not have. We were going to have time for the next workshop anyway. I had to sacrifice the topic because we were already approaching almost an hour and a half of the meeting time.

Fidias brought up the topic of drugs, and the assembly was questioned about the situation. There were no significant reactions. Someone mentioned that the topic of addictions or vices in the community had more to do with alcoholism than with drugs. People did not react. Xiomara addresses the topic of pests, asking whether or not it would be in the health section. Some give their opinion. There is some confusion, but they end up defining it as the topic of garbage or solid waste management. Several intervene and talk about the presence of a vacant lot connected to the community, in which many residents have now taken advantage of dumping garbage there, generating infections, diseases, and bad smells.

Closing remarks

Everything is limited in these workshops: hope is precarious, commitment is fragile, the issues are deep and complex, and there are too many for the time available. Reality is overwhelming. Challenging it is, above all, an intellectual exercise in which we play at taking reality and turning it into a kind of play, something like what is referred to in Genet's piece, The Balcony, where we allow ourselves to dream of local democracy, with diagnoses and imagined actions, each one with their roles.

Challenging reality seems to involve daring to dream, a common good that is perceived as forbidden in the implacable and crushing reality of social reproduction where, for generations, these inhabitants of El Progreso live a life where the only point of escape in the future is the illusion of winning the lottery or of looking at how those above live, knowing that this status highly probably will never be reached by them. But here, reality is discussed, and the possibilities of changing it are imagined. The assembly assumed itself with real decision-making power, the key

to constituting itself as a Neighborhood Board, which was accustomed to reacting only to contingencies.

Time was running out, and we had to conclude. It was already very late, and the topics needed more treatment. It would have taken two sessions to work through it adequately. However, the next workshop would do the job since it was the participants' turn to speak and present the subject.

Here we are, and I feel that, at the end of this second workshop, in an exercise of informed discussion, we have held a session that not even the municipalities achieve: being able to convene knowledge, discuss its findings without partisan politicking, all oriented in the same direction, where the common good prevails, the general interest guides the session. Double quality control occurs by verifying official statistics: social science and the people's experience are articulated and enrich the process.

Neighborhood policy seems to prove its worth again. Its democratic effectiveness is in terms of the fluidity of the workshop's development and the focus with which it has been worked without distracting or accessory elements. It is true that, due to the workshop's design, the authority still resides in one person who controls the session in terms of time, schedule of actions, and order of parliament. It differs significantly from political parties opposing a parliamentary session of any mayor's office. But the interesting thing is that the ideology here is primarily to solve problems from a concrete perspective, without significant interference from other ingredients that are strangers to the community's issues. Politics based on the neighborhood refines the interest in the public to an exercise of thinking and solving community problems. From this workshop, we have

contributed to motivating, informing, and organizing social action from the body destined for these purposes. The mere existence of it has already made local history.

The issues of education remained, as one of the participants took two minutes and said that there were no educational centers for the children and young people of the neighborhood that were nearby and that even though efforts were made a long time ago and a place was located that was already built and that could be used for such purposes, the efforts have not been able to materialize precisely because of the weakness of the Neighborhood Board in its capacity for internal organization and agency towards State institutions, such as the Ministry of Education.

Another person intervened and said that the employment issue needed to be addressed, too. But the pending matters were more than the time we had available. People were active and willing to propose initiatives.

There was one last point to discuss with the assembly: the participation of the people. Without that, we all remembered, there would be no democracy. I had to raise the issue as a priority or at least analyze it due to its crucial implications. It was said that, in the last elections of the Residents' Board, a significant number of residents expressed their vote. Some 600, that is, two-thirds of those who were counted in the SIUBEN census. This shows that although social action is not a priority issue for people, we must understand that this is so since they need examples to refer to or be inspired by. There is a certain apathy towards resolving problems where contemporary individualism assumes its principles of “everyone solves their problems.” There are niches of opportunity that can be exploited, whereby, through specific events and participatory processes, interest can be fed by acts in which people can be protagonists. I shared with the participants that it was difficult to maintain people's interest in processes in which they remain on the sidelines. Above all, that is the message that their lives communicate to them in their status as citizens

relegated only to living off the decisions made by others, as happens in real life, where people feel excluded from participatory processes.

The workshop concluded with a small “happy birthday” for one of those present and a closing prayer. We thanked the SIUBEN officials not only for their presentation but for staying and actively participating in the session. It was essential for me that they participated in this way, given this state institution's interest in becoming a partner in the project and a close ally of the community and the Neighbors' Council in particular. Time continued to be a critical issue. We concluded an hour and forty-five minutes after it had started. Still, with the satisfaction of a session that was able to develop with the active involvement of those present and that kept the interest and enthusiasm alive among the participants.

Reviewing the evaluation questionnaires for this second workshop, I found that the responses were relatively homogeneous. Twenty people filled out the questionnaires, which we reproduce here because they provide valuable information regarding the participants' criteria and degree of acceptance.

When asked how they felt today, the participants responded with great satisfaction with the workshop:

1. Very good.
2. Very good.
3. Excellently good.
4. Well motivated.
5. Good.
6. Very good.
7. Very good.
8. Good.
9. Good.
10. Very good.

11. Excellent.

12. Very interesting.

13. Very good.

14. Perfect and comfortable.

15. Very good.

16. Excellent, very interesting.

17. Excellent.

18. Good.

19. Very good.

20. Very good.

When asked what they learned most today, almost everyone focused on greeting the presentation of the community statistics, of which quite a few said they now know their neighborhood better:

1. Tax data that allows for the determination of the fundamental problems of the community.
2. Relevant data on the situation of the sector.
3. I was very struck by the data shown by the SIUBEN collaborators regarding the community.
4. Types of poverty and poverty measurement.
5. How the results of the census are divided, among other things.
6. Knowing precisely how many of us there are and the statistical information.
7. How vulnerable a person can be in monetary poverty.
8. The data collected by SIUBEN.
9. The data that allowed me to know the community a little better.
10. Communication with others.
11. Statistics of the sector.
12. Statistics of the Community.
13. Together, we can be the solution; participation is essential to understanding our environment.
14. About communication.
15. That participation is fundamental.
16. About the statistical data of the community.
17. The statistical presentation and the assignment of work for the next week.
18. The information from SIUBEN.
19. How the class was done and how I learned how poverty is measured.
20. Identifying the problems of the community.

In the question about what they liked most about the workshop, between praise for the methodology (“dynamism,” “participatory interaction,” “explanation of the percentages,” and “pleasant and participatory,” among other expressions, they established approval of all of the dynamics of the process. I am left with one that satisfies me in particular, where they recognize the explanations I made for each presentation of the SIUBEN statistics, where I stopped and, as the answer says, “abounded” on the subject. Here are the answers:

1. The preliminary search for solutions in favor of the community.
2. The methodology.
3. It is enjoyable and participatory.
4. Getting to know the problems more closely.
5. The explanation of the percentage in all areas of the neighborhood.
6. The dynamism and integration.
7. All the proposals to build a better community.
8. The interaction between people.
9. The participatory interaction.
10. The participation of the guests.
11. The instructor's explanations of each statistic abounded.
12. Everything.
13. Viewing the statistics helps us understand what our vulnerabilities are and how to address them.
14. On the topic of health and especially safety.
15. The development of the topics.
16. The dynamics with the SIUBEN representatives and the facilitator.
17. The statistics presented.
18. What I am learning.
19. The way of dealing with the topics.
20. The participation of the visitors.

The same is true of the question, “Is there anything that made you uncomfortable in today's class?” It seems very well received, and no one felt wrong. Only one person considered that sometimes people behave jokingly during the workshop.

1. Nothing.
2. No.
3. Some people seem to see the activity as a kind of informal session.
4. Nothing.
5. No.
6. Nothing.
7. N/A.
8. Nothing.
9. No.
10. Everything was fine.
11. Nothing.
12. No.
13. No.
14. Nothing.
15. No, everything was fine.
16. So far, nothing.
17. Nothing.
18. I have not felt uncomfortable.
19. Nothing.
20. Everything was fine.

In general, were there any recommendations or comments in the section to improve something in the class? The participants responded that everything was going well, but some specified the need to manage time better to finish earlier.

1. Controlling class time.
2. N/A.
3. It should be a little shorter.
4. No.
5. Be more Dynamic.
6. Nothing.
7. We should finish on time.
8. Start on time to finish early.
9. Improve timing and maybe a little toast at the end.
10. N/A.
11. Manage time well.
12. N/A.
13. No.
14. Not at all, everything is perfect.
15. Nothing.
16. Everything is going very well.

17. Focusing more on youth issues is not of interest.
18. So far so Good.
19. More punctuality.
20. Finishing on time

Organizing time better is one of my challenges as a facilitator for the following workshops. But generally, it was a successful day because people kept their attention. They told me at the end of the workshop that it was the first time that a state institution sat down with them not to resolve something specific but to discuss community problems. They say they needed this because they feel they have a strategic partner, more than just a public bureaucracy. In other words, the democratic conversation between citizens and their institutions could be established. The fact that they could perceive it this way brings faith in democracy, teaches them about its possibilities, and invites them to reproduce it locally. The participant-citizen comes out strengthened in his democratic conviction, and his personal and community dignity is strengthened. This is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding achievements of the workshop as a lesson.

From a pragmatist practice, action produces effects on reality. A collaborative inquiry in the search for truth transformed the session into a laboratory where the statistical facts revealed and the social criticism I formulated as a sociologist were confronted in situ, live, directly, with the people's life experiences. After the interviews and their analysis, we moved on to a second, more advanced, and complete stage, where pragmatism informed by sociology was working by integrating the participants as protagonists of the story that was taking place.

Chapter 7: Workshop 3: Reconstructing the responses to community problems.

Based on the results of the past discussions, we would move on to a third workshop, where, organized in groups and by community problems, we would converse and seek consensus on the priorities and viable solutions to these various issues. It was supposed to be a re-engineering workshop. Its objective was to rebuild the Neighborhood Board's pragmatic imagination about community problems and reach internal agreements on viable solutions and motivation for social action.

Rebuilding social action for change.

In the first session, we discussed the community issue through conceptual and experiential perspectives. The second workshop session addressed the community's statistical reality through a tripartite conversation (SIUBEN, community, and sociology). We then entered a third session, introducing ourselves to the first imagination exercises for social change in El Progreso. Based on concrete examples from the neighborhood, we invented possibilities to challenge some aspects of the existing reality and create an action scheme for a new one.

Going deeper into these issues was about knowing each of the problems from the contribution of the diversity of experiences of the group and from the solutions that would be built by consensus in the group. This would also contribute, at least those were my initial expectations, to learning a parliament that would adopt the optimal point of information, fluidity, and organization capable of producing the participants as if it were a rehearsal of a new Neighborhood Council.

This time, I sought a more significant role in the discussion among participants. If, in the first workshop, it was expected, as happened, that participation would be more of a spectator than a protagonist since it was a new subject (the opportunity became a moment of encounter with the project: its facilitator, its objectives, the dynamics, the concepts); in the second workshop, we planned for participation to increase from passive to active. This happened with the participants' different interventions, who reacted to the interventions of SIUBEN and mine, pointing out elements or enriching the perspectives on community problems from their respective life experiences in the neighborhood. In this third workshop, the idea was that they would assume a more significant role through the presentations, always accompanied by me. This was planned, above all, for the second part of the workshop.

But before that, we had to work on some preparatory concepts to address the problems and their possible solutions in a broad and sustainable perspective over time. Hence, the notions of development, planning, and strategy needed to be worked on, especially the central idea of the workshop: social change and the ways to achieve it within the future actions of the Residents' Council.

We arrived at the third workshop with lessons learned from previous sessions and significant achievements. Of the latter, the most important was that the project continued to exist. Given the uncertainty that overwhelmed me about the participants' reaction to the first two sessions, the enthusiasm and interest of the participants continued to strengthen. It was evident that, despite all their difficult situations, ways of life, and the tradition of apathy towards any social action, the participants continued participating in the project. Of course, I was constantly anxious about it from beginning to end, aware of the context's fragility. In any case, the quality of

participation had to be sustained almost in a personal exercise, hand by hand, in a constant action in which no resource should be left unused, both within and outside the workshop sessions.

Mid-term socio-analysis of the project.

It is necessary to reiterate that the project was a relatively rare or unprecedented intruder in some participants' biographies and daily lives. It was a challenging task to maintain interest in an exercise that was far from their primary responsibilities and interests with their families and on a personal level. The intensity of their lives between one workshop and another, overcoming all kinds of problems inherent to their economic, cultural, social, and political condition of poverty, could at any time lower the spirit or availability of the participants. With the second workshop already concluded, it was evident that the situation could become delicate. The WhatsApp group helped mitigate that possibility.

In this virtual space, they happened what we intellectually addressed in the first workshop: the praxis of what a community is and the importance of personal exchange to ratify the cohesion of the group, the feeling of belonging, the constant renewal of the social dignity of each person just by being the recipient of that "Good morning, friends" that happened daily in the WhatsApp of the project. Every day, someone posted a "Hello," and another answered, "Have a nice day," others posted different visual resources, such as stickers or messages the members shared, taken from the internet. It was announced and celebrated when someone in the group had a birthday. I, for my part, encouraged and participated in that community spirit. I participated in their brief exchanges (the greetings that were made early in the morning), and I made some comments on what was seen in the previous workshop or some perspectives to take into account for the next

one. My appearances were always just limited to announcing some details that needed to be remembered from the development of the sessions. Passing on the information was essential. I tried not to have too much reflection but rather encouragement. Their daily lives need the latter, not the former. The objective was to be there, with our presence accompanying, making the warmth of the project felt within their life agendas.

Fidias and José, figures of significant legitimacy in the group, made their contributions of encouragement. They animated the participants, reminding them of the next meeting and each one's duties (punctuality, bringing the folder with the notebook, and project documents distributed in the first session). They also post some news or simple definitions that could keep the participants interested in the topics already discussed or about to be discussed. Without a doubt, Mauss's idea about how the exchange between people re-establishes the community daily was confirmed in the project's WhatsApp and performed adhesion functions among the participants.

Likewise, a job was done of calling each participant by phone to summon them for the third occasion. I was not able to talk to all of them. The idea was to take advantage of the call and the follow-up and discussion of the assigned tasks so that in the calls, one could measure the degree of enthusiasm or interest on each occasion. For the third call, I took advantage of the task they had pending to do in the two groups assigned in workshop number two. I gathered information about the participants' moods regarding the project in each phone call. As an ethnographer, the short but exciting phone conversations allowed me to delve a little deeper into their daily lives and perceive the standards of living they lead.

Each time I called them, they answered in the middle of some activity, as if the call surprised them at a busy moment, and they took a break to take it after they realized who they were talking to. There was a sense of urgency on the other end of the phone, as if they were doing some

professional or personal task and I was interrupting them. I could hear sounds behind them, of people or those typical of Santo Domingo transportation (horns, motorcycle noises, music, etc.). In short, the general feeling I received when talking to them was that of busy people with challenging life routines. In several of the conversations, their participation in the workshop represented a different moment for them, a distraction taken on by the participants in the face of the heaviness of their daily routines.

From their phone interactions, I sensed a genuine desire to learn and, in the least expressive cases, a moral commitment to their neighborhood. “Oh, but of course, I’ll be there,” said one; “don’t worry, I already have it [the next workshop] scheduled,” said another. They may seem insignificant details, but for me, each expression was a balm for the anguish of not eventually having a sufficient quorum for the next session.

I suggested to several groups that, if necessary, I visit the neighborhood on the weekend and work directly with them on the assigned tasks. But their schedules were complicated, and I learned, once and for all, that the weekends were a sacred time for them, either to do things they couldn't do on weekdays or it was their time for fun. The latter was well reserved for them. The weekend before the third workshop, I walked in the neighborhood. The participants greeted me but were engaged in their respective recreational activities: playing dominoes, running errands, and sitting with friends. It is extraordinary how the working class fully participates in their leisure time in the Dominican culture of neighborhoods like El Progreso.

Despite this, slightly longer calls were made to work as a group on the assigned topic at workshop number two. Telephone conversations were held with at least three groups to follow up on or discuss with the members of those groups the possible aspects of the problems to be dealt with and how to approach them.

The issue of time in the two preceding workshops has been the main complaint expressed by the participants until now, so I have taken measures to prevent the third session from being overextended. This was a vital issue because I could not allow it to happen right in the middle of the project, precisely to avoid significant dropouts by participants. The issue of the participant's link to the project reached a critical moment of maturity in which any element of the project could be persuasive or dissuasive. The forecast was good, but always on the lookout for any unforeseen event. I designed a session that could align with the original plan but limit the time issue.

For this third session, it was the opportunity to delve into the community's problems, which had been classified and distributed in groups of two people as follows:

1. Public safety (robberies, shootings, muggings, assaults).
2. Community signage and contingency plan (floods, atmospheric and earth disasters, fires).
3. Peaceful and harmonious coexistence (noise pollution and basketball court coordination).
4. Community health (information, prevention, support, chronic diseases and disability).
5. Sewerage and drinking water treatment in the eastern sector of the neighborhood.
6. Employment/unemployment, technical-labor training.
7. Attention to the most vulnerable populations in the sector (21% according to the census).
8. Community participation in the affairs of the Neighborhood Board.
9. Schooling for children and young from the neighborhood.

10. Attention to the immigrant population.

Initially, the third session could be for presentations by each group that had been organized. Although there were many groups, I estimated initially that at least five would participate. This estimate was necessary to adjust in light of the reality of the events. First, I knew that most groups needed to have their presentations ready for the day of the third workshop. Taking this situation into account, I decided to shorten the duration of the session, which was a prudent imperative, and at the same time, dedicate more time to addressing the community problems that may arise from the presentations. This would be a segment of the workshop designed for the second part. This implied reducing the groups' presentations to one or two at most.

The first part was projected to address social change and its importance in the project. The good thing was that the part of the presentation, being the second, would allow me to see how the first group performed and whether it would be possible to include a second presentation.

Social change and a proposal for its implementation

Before addressing the workshop's central theme in the first part, we briefly reviewed the idea of community and its anthropological structure with the participants as a synthesis of what was discussed in the preceding sessions. I expressed myself in the following way:

> On the first day, I reminded those present that we talked about what a community is, and we said that a community is essentially the exchange between people. That is, it is in the exchange, in the communication, in the “good morning” in the mornings where the

> community is produced. If we arrived here and did not greet each other, creating a community would not be easy. So, it is essentially in the exchange, in the "hi," in the "good night," in a "hello, how are you?", "excuse me," "Thank you," "May I have this?" that a community begins to be recreated every day. A community of wishes, spirit, [of past and future] …And all of that responds, of course, to a desire, right? A desire to want to be well. Ultimately, when one says "good morning" to another, one gives them part of themselves. We saw that when we gave something to the person next to us, the person next to us gave us something of themselves [in the exercise played in the second workshop].

After a brief review of the social sciences, where we talked about how public policies are not only nourished by sociology (but also by law, history, political sciences, economics, etc.), I then went on to present the topic of change from the perspective or paradigm currently in use by Dominican State. I addressed those present in the following way:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** The Dominican State has a development model called the Quality of Life or People's Well-being Model. So, what are we going to see? How will social change occur? "How does social change occur?" Because understanding a community is good, we tried to do that on the first day when we saw the concepts of dignity, social justice, and democracy.

I quickly reviewed the concepts again to serve as a basis for the explanation:

> Dignity is the idea that we are all equal and have the same rights. Social justice is the idea that everyone should have whatever they need according to their needs. That would be social justice. Exactly. Ramón said it very well the other day: Democracy is the

participation of the people. Giving something to a person is useless if that person does not participate in the decisions because they will always stay there.

The idea is that everyone can participate in the elements that make up a community because, in reality, community is participation. When I say participation, I mean that if you are a community member, you participate by receiving or giving something to it. Of course, in return, you are expected to reciprocate with the community and be reciprocated by the community. "Do you remember the same exercise we did here?" I asked the participants.

I then project a few slides from a PowerPoint presentation on social change and planning*:*

How does social change occur? Change is difficult because one can always do the same thing, and things will stay the same. This is important because social change brings together dignity, community, social justice, and participation, that is, democracy. There is a plan called the National Multiannual Plan. It is with which the Government, the Dominican State, conceives and organizes its public action, that is, its public policies. All public policy refers to this plan: the National Multiannual Plan of the Public Sector. They make it multiannual because it covers several years; this responds to a National Development Strategy; that is, the country gave itself some objectives that it had to meet between now and 2030, from 2011 or 2012, I believe, until 2030 exactly.

Here, we discussed the basis of a government's policy. It was time to address how the central power conceives and manufactures its policies, what concepts it uses, and what planning methods it uses.

Basic ideas that could be useful for participants when developing the following exercises to address the problems involve discussing the diagnoses and possible solutions at the community level and organizing the actions that would eventually put these measures into practice.

> A National Development Strategy is: what should schools be like? How many people have to be literate? How many people have to have been promoted from 6th or 7th grade, that is, from primary and secondary school? How should Social Security be? How many hospitals should be accessible? How many boys and girls should be vaccinated? What should the infant mortality rate be? As low as possible, with indicators.

> Look, [here in El Progreso], we must include the environment. This National Development Strategy is a theoretical document about where we are going. Exactly. This plan, the Multiannual Plan, is like the landing of that. That is, how those objectives will be achieved, conquered, and reached. This multiannual plan has a development model, right? That development model is based on a theory of social change.

The participants' interactions became increasingly active when recalling what was discussed in both. When addressing the issue of social change, I recalled the difficulty of social change in a community, first from a purely individual perspective: how difficult it is for a person to change their personality, habits established after many years or even cultural traditions.

Then, one of the most fruitful exchanges between the group of participants and myself arose when the sociological explanation I was giving about the difficulty of social change for people and communities (and the pitfalls of public policy) was supported and extended by several of the participants, who gave examples (with historical facts from the life of the Dominican Republic, or with more private experiences that they had lived or known) that connected the social theory with concrete cases.

The active participation of the people allowed me to enrich the explanation, extending it with other examples and making it more complete. The result is that what I was saying was strengthened with different variations. It was an investigation carried out at the pace of oral communication, where we walked through a path of statements and examples to which the participants responded from other angles. Then, I incorporated those angles into the explanation, refining and thus strengthening the knowledge we produced as both a sociological inquiry and a pedagogical exercise of social action.

My presentation became an intense and smooth collaborative conversation, where the participants took the initiative, no longer asking or intervening but directly contributing to verifying the collective truth being built in the workshop. Sociological learning about social dynamics in contexts of poverty was gathered from the participants. Here, I understand learning as incorporating a critical point of view, a look from below, different from the traditional vision that rests on the individual epistemic. Here, we connected the behaviors and patterns of behavior of the social agent with their social history, that is, reconstructing the historicity of the subject. This was an exciting moment for me as a sociologist and educator, one of the most emotional high points of all those experienced in the project up to that point. Here we reproduce it:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** How do you transform a community? How can we transform people from the conditions in which they were born? For example, poverty refers to conditions of decency that are overcome by misery and deprivation of essential consumer goods or socioeconomic conditions with which a person is born and grows. How do we change that? That is not easy. Let us think about ourselves: how would a change occur in us? […] If someone likes meat but has a health problem, they must change their diet. That's not easy. Imagine if that's challenging for a person or a character. Tell me…
>
> **Participant 1:** Imagine how it could be for a whole nation.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes. Look at the character of a person: “Juan Miguel is fast-paced,” “Yes, I have to control myself because.” But how does one change? It is how one breathes.

Participant 2: It can be challenging.

Juan Miguel Pérez: It is difficult. So, imagine you have been dealing with people as organizers and leaders somehow. As Vanessa says, imagine how difficult it is for a town or community to change.

Participant 2: It takes work!

Juan Miguel Pérez: It is still difficult to change one's will, but the truth is that one can submit to a specific discipline... And also, one thing: [change needs to be] without authoritarianism...

Participant 3: Because one has to go in the gentlest way possible to try to change something...

Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes, because [if it is a social reality] the first thing is to convince [someone], that is, the first thing is to attract him, that is the first thing. The second is to persuade him; the third is, in that conviction, to try to add him to a cause because he can say I agree with you, yes, but [he asks] are you going to make me participate in the neighborhood council? In the works [that decide what needs to be changed, and where and how]? It is complex to carry out the leadership of a complex change, but first, we will focus on the change. What does the state-managed multi-year plan say? Starting from a model called the well-being of the people, how can the change be produced, I repeat, from conditions of poverty to the well-being of the people?

Participant 1: I can give you an example, which was the case of La Barquita[27]. I don't know what percentage of the family was removed because the government built the apartments where they were moved in; they were on the riverbank and were removed from there. After that, I remind you that they returned [from where they had been removed] about a year ago. My residential area had a strike because they had to pay a maintenance fee. And they had not adapted to that change, which was the government […] that took out all those people who lived there, and they still haven't adapted to an apartment, they don't live next to the rivers, but there was a social change, no?

Juan Miguel Pérez: Look, look, what a good example. I have another perspective on the same thing. Reality says that in changes like that, you remove people who live next to the river and take them to a supposedly better place where everything is not near the river.

Participant 1: They are removing them from their habitat.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes. And it is not only their habitat, but if you do not change the living conditions that led them to live next to the river, they will return to the former place next to the river. Why? For the following reasons: Suppose you will take them to a new urbanization. But that boy, girl, or family next to the river did not have a job, or the job they had was very precarious, or they were day laborers, so they did not have the constant resources to support themselves. So, I can take you anywhere: to a palace, and you will end up selling the palace because that is the only thing there, but you do not have the means to support yourself. So, you will start selling, perhaps, the toilet lid or a window because you have nothing to eat. You will live in an apartment, fine, but what happens then? When you have nothing else, you know what? You will go and live and maybe rent that [place] because that will give you an income to buy food. And you will go live wherever you can for free or cheaper. Did I make myself understandable? One has to try to give these people

[27] A very popular and marginal neighborhood in Santo Domingo, located on the banks of the Ozama River and inhabited by very impoverished populations, to whom the government recently gave apartments in a new housing complex so that they would abandon their shacks next to the river.

a job or facilitate the possibility of training them to get a job so that they can support themselves.

Participant 4: In Las Caoba[28], there are no more owners or beneficiaries of that housing program. Every apartment has already been sold.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Exactly. You see…

Participant 5: It was the result of that situation, that was when Balaguer[29] handed that over in 1978. In Tres Brazos[30], Balaguer handed over two urbanizations, and the people had already sold them. In my family, they had three [of those apartments] during the Balaguer era; their children still have them because their parents have already died. But to support those people there, the government had to give employment to each one of the police officers and guards from that era who received their apartments; they still have them; however, the people from La Ciénega[31], Guachupita[32], Balaguer moved them twice from there, but they returned both times.

Participant 4: And look, that is another example. That is like the parents; let's say they live their whole lives, and the children have them at their disposal. They put them in an apartment; they take them out [of their own houses]. These parents will not feel comfortable because they will be practically moving from their daily lives and habits.

Thanks to the participants' interventions, the dynamic could be part of any sociology course, only that much more active and illustrated with live examples than those we usually find in a university. The participants understood two fundamental elements of the sociology of this type of case, where

[28] Another slum neighborhood in the city of Santo Domingo.
[29] Dominican dictator who ruled the country between 1966 and 1978 and was then elected president through elections from 1986 to 1996.
[30] Marginal neighborhood of the city of Santo Domingo.
[31] Marginal neighborhood of the city of Santo Domingo.
[32] Marginal neighborhood of the city of Santo Domingo.

people are removed from a space with specific characteristics and moved to another with characteristics different from their culture of origin. First, people's habitus, the set of durable dispositions learned from early childhood, stays the same whether you move from one place to another or from one social class to another. I explained how people speak, eat, and have culturally structured and socially conditioned preferences. It is hard to change them; let’s not even say it quickly or with a simple move.

Second, public policies often make the mistake of thinking that a habitat change is enough to get people out of poverty. That, without a doubt, can improve habitat conditions, but it does not necessarily imply a change in people's agencies, which is much more complex. As has been seen in countless examples (Cela, 2021), it can have the opposite effect: when a population is moved to another place where their survival strategies are already in place, for example, in impoverished neighborhoods, where the horizontal topology in which their houses are located next to each other facilitated the contact and functioning of solidarity networks (when one house did not have what another could have and share - resources for cooking, transportation, medicines, etc.), the mechanisms of mutual aid, typical of a neighborhood that has matured over the years, can be affected.

As a third lesson, there is the notion of symbolic violence, that forced transgression, in which physical force is not necessarily used to attack the well-being or integrity of a person (in its moral, physical, intellectual, social, etc. dimensions). This applies, for example, when elderly parents are arbitrarily removed from the environment where they spent their entire lives, as described in the case mentioned by the last participant in the exchange quoted above. Here, the interventions cited by the participants suggest their understanding of concepts and their management of the social perspective that the project seeks to develop as critical thinking about

the reality of El Progreso. It was exciting how, on a few occasions in this third session, after I explained a given point, they began to participate and complete or enrich my interventions in case they detected any omission or lack on my part. For example, in the following intervention, when I integrate the concepts already worked on of dignity, to which we must always return as a reference, one of the participants reminds me of something: *But social justice has been missing. It has been missing for many years.*

Rebuilding social dignity: the mission of the Neighborhood Council

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Dignity, the importance of everyone, and social action so that this dignity is social justice that can only be achieved with participation. Notice how the concepts we saw just now are getting involved: community is all of us, dignity is that each one belongs to that community, social justice is the action to change the community, and how is that achieved? Everyone's participation in the Neighborhood Council is so meaningful.

Within the presentation exercise, the participant's reflections were enriched, and it was assumed that these dimensions would be more determinants as the project's action-research process developed. The main question here concerns the organization of social change and the elements that would intervene on the scale of a space such as El Progreso.

So far, the project has been dealing relatively well with its triple dimension: (1) sociological research on the territory and its possibilities for improvement; (2) pedagogical experimentation on how to rebuild hope and citizen sensitivity; and (3) the political reconstruction of local democracy, as a framework for social action of the organized community. Each dimension was nourished by

the other, forming a whole fertile with ideas and possibilities for innovation. Also, as an action-research exercise, each round informs the next.

Before starting the third session, within the balance that passed to the first two sessions and the emerging ideas, I wrote a small scheme for social change that positioned the Neighborhood Council as its center. It was based on the following assumption: (1) Neighborhood Council members usually have the intellectual and material possibility of being able to lead social action initiatives considered necessary to improve the life of its community, starting with those people who are most vulnerable; (2) these actions, in turn, would impact the inhabitants, who in turn may respond in reciprocity to the Neighborhood Council with recognition, trust, and hopefully with some personal participation in community affairs. This scheme responded to the model proposed by Mauss in his essay on the gift, and it also has the advantage of being easy to put to work.

As a prelude to the second part of the workshop, I then dedicated a few words to the conditions of possibility for social change, which resembled the government's conception of the matter. It was essential to speak the same conceptual language as the State, not to obey them unthinkingly, but because it is the most significant legitimacy a community can have when claiming or negotiating communal issues with authorities. The community needs to claim justice from the universal rights already recognized by the State through its laws and constitutional principles. After addressing the need to build a reasonable community agency, I suggest the group do it in such a marginal and impoverished context like the one in El Progresso, starting from the general principle of equity:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** That action that I told you about equity, for each person, according to their needs, is what is most lacking in this country. For example, you have streets and

> avenues of wealthy people that do not necessarily have to be paved before a country or a barrio road. Priorities are a problem here. Ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you something: the most expensive thing in this country is living as an impoverished person. I am going to give an example. My college students, when they come to class, they do it from Manoguayabo, from Buenos Aires, from Herrera, from Reparto Los Tres Brazos, from Brisas del Est; they come from Haina, from Pantoja, from Los Alcarrizos, from Villa Duarte, from San Luis… I ask them: at what time do they get up? At 4:00 AM, on average, they responded; how many cars do they take? Three or four vehicles, they answered. And how long does that take them? Two and three hours. When I was showering, my students had already traveled for two hours; when I got up at 6:00 AM, they were already on their way from one to two hours. I don't, because I live close by, but they do. So, everything is more expensive. Here we go to the third point: it is built in the territory. Change does not occur in an office but in the streets here, the community, and the relationships within. I reiterate three elements; with this, change must be communication between everyone. Change is in the people and their rights. Change has to come from the territory. So, we have a perfect scenario to generate a process that, at least, opens some hope for the people. That is where we have to start: opening hope.

It was clear to everyone that living in decency was a universal right, and to claim and defend the community for that was a Neighborhood Council responsibility. So, I invite you to experiment with an exercise where we could act as a governing body for a moment.

<u>An essay on communal policy. The case of Diabetes in the El Progreso.</u>

We then reached the second and last part of this third workshop, which was reserved for presenting the work assigned to the groups. Due to time constraints, everything indicated that we could show one instead of two of the groups. Everything would depend on how much time the first presentation may take. I wanted to privilege the quality of the moment and not restrict any possible discussion that could arise among participants.

The first group would take on health, specifically diabetes, in the sector. X (woman) and R (man) were responsible for presenting the problem. It should be said that, with the group, I discussed the exercise beforehand (the previous weekend), where we exchanged opinions and made suggestions. The presentation would be joint, between them and me, but they would take on a leading role. It was a conversation more than anything else.

I presented the group's theme:

> Diabetes, treatment, and prevention. And perhaps the most essential thing: prevention. Why? Because we consider that prevention was an exercise that could involve the entire community. Because there are people who already have diabetes. According to statistics, 6%. That is a lot—6%. However, some are prone to diabetes. That is, they have a hereditary situation because they have an uncle, a mother, and a brother who has diabetes or has diabetes. The person loses abilities: they have vision problems and weight problems, and it generates a high cost, for example, with insulin. But all of that also deteriorates the conditions of well-being in their space. So, a preventive action is strategic. Here it is. Look at what we describe: Name of the problem: Diabetes in the Progreso sector, how it affects the community and its rights. What did we talk about earlier? Community development is done through rights. So, I would like X to come by here to read what we have written there, which we did together.

> X takes the floor and begins his participation: Diabetes in the El Progreso sector: Treatment and prevention, a health issue. Description of the problem: How it affects the community

and its rights. Include data from surveys or existing records if there are any. Define the problem as one of community interest- the community as a whole.

According to SIUBEN, diabetes is the third most common particular health condition in the community, with 6%. A large part of diabetes is caused by pre-existing conditions of a hereditary nature, which are, in turn, aggravated by specific eating habits and sedentary conditions.

Juan Miguel Pérez: That means they do not exercise...

Xiomara: Exactly. It is a high-cost disease. Let's see how it affects the community and the rights of its members and the community members, which is the justification for the action of the Neighborhood Board. It is a disease that is very costly for those who suffer from it and their families. Still, above all, it is a disease that weakens the human capacities of the person, also affecting the well-being of their environment and their life.

I can testify to this because my mother was diabetic, and because of diabetes, she was also hypertensive, but what was happening? The neighbors, who all knew her here, said that Mami did not do any exercise; she sat there all the time on a piece of furniture. We told her, “Mom has to walk; she has to,” she said she couldn’t walk because of a condition she had in one of her knees. Thank God, Mom never had to take insulin, but it was a lifelong treatment, and she had to be given a diet that was appropriate for her condition, which was also very expensive because she couldn’t eat what we ate. So, organized community action can help alleviate the situation of these families and, at the same time, help prevent other cases. I agree with prevention because, as the professor and the books say, it is hereditary.

So, if my mother was diabetic, my grandfather was diabetic. That is a condition that, even if I get tested, I am already becoming aware that I have to do my part to not test positive for that and to stop being sedentary and change my eating habits.

Possible causes and community collateral consequences of the problem. Here, we have the economic factor in families with that situation or a health problem that tends to deteriorate. Then, a lack of knowledge may be fatal for those with prediabetic conditions. Multiple causes of non-prevention of chronic diseases like diabetes include the lack of tradition of having a family doctor, lack of tradition of medical check-ups, economic costs, and, at the same time.

So, I intervened, and I did so based on information that I had and that I thought my fellow participants did not have, such as established public policies (such as the case of the national primary health care project), which would go in the direction of what was stated, but which for various reasons had not yet come into operation, or had not even been communicated in a significant way to the population. It was my duty to quote her, so I asked for permission and intervened:

One thing here is that we do not have; look, it says there, for example, that there is no lack, that is, no family doctor. That family doctor is the one that, if we had one, we would say: "Look, I have to do a pre-check, I have to measure your sugar level, I have to evaluate you," because all of that is in a protocol where there are family doctors who attend to a family on a recurring, temporary basis, but that does not exist here. So, there is a lot of ignorance about what diabetes is and its consequences. Another thing is essential. What do Dominicans eat the most?

Participant 1: Rice.

Participant 2: The Dominican flag![33]

Juan Miguel Pérez: I would say fat. That is what Dominicans eat the most. Fried green food, lots of oil, spaghetti, salami, etc. Why? Because fat is cheaper than protein.

[33] It is the name given to the everyday dish of Dominicans in general and Dominicans from the neighborhoods in particular, made up of rice, red beans, chicken or beef, and ripe plantain.

X: Yes, much more.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Much more, right?

Participant 3: Yes.

Juan Miguel Pérez: So, we have a diet problem because that diet is, all of that is linked to the possibility of developing diabetes because that diet is linked to poverty conditions.

I introduced the topic from a sociological perspective: even in hereditary issues, poverty affects the possibility that a biological condition can develop or not. Everything is social in one way or another. Malnutrition is an excellent example of something very typical of impoverished populations. Here, a participant addresses it:

Participant 4: Many of us feed ourselves; we don't eat properly.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Exactly. So, it's not [so much] lack of food; in some cases, it does exist, but it is essentially wrong or lousy eating habits. So, malnutrition is an issue in the community because it can generate all these elements. Let's continue, please.

The time has come for equity-based proposals and formulas. In past workshops, all the constitutive elements of sensitivity regarding the population and its particular circumstances were addressed.

X: Proposals for possible solutions: from actions organized as a community, from the neighborhood council, considering principles of dignity, social justice, and democracy.

Strategy: The idea behind the problem is to raise awareness in the community and public authorities to improve the situation of those who already have diabetes and to prevent the rest of the community from getting it.

Actions: First, we need to know who suffers from diabetes [in the community] and how they manage it daily. Once the inventory is done, prioritize the patients in worse economic and health conditions. Here, the principle of equity is applied, as well as knowing the community's specific problems and starting a community campaign. Second, the public or associative bodies that deal with the issue should be investigated to facilitate a general contribution to treatment. Third, organize operations in the area of preventive education and also operations to establish diagnoses. Fourth, locate who has or does not have SENASA[34] insurance and do the necessary work with the public insurance. In other words, investigate. We told the professor that some SENASA insurance campaigns had been held here at El Progreso, but since it has been a while now, it is good that we do it again to do a survey. You have to add it all up. [35]

I retook the floor to elaborate a little more. During the sessions so far, the members of the Neighborhood Board often felt that they needed more information about competent public or private institutions or offered their services in certain areas. Passing on that information was also an exercise that was evident in the development of the presentation (and of the project in general).

Juan Miguel Pérez: So, look, that [that X points out] is essential: starting [an action plan on diabetes in the community]. The issue of how the situation is in that specific environment, okay, there was 6% (of people with Diabetes]. Still, then a report from a commission created for such purposes would have to say: some so many people suffer from this, we are going to try to locate them, and we are going to try to see first in that person what their living conditions are; what state of power they have to deal with their situation; how their advanced state of health is, for example, beginning or in a terminal period, whatever it may be. But, in addition, we have to ask ourselves: do they have any [medical] insurance? From that, one goes to those institutions that one has already located and gets information [about their services and procedures]. It could be SENASA or any other. Look,

[34] SENASA is the acronym for the National Health Service, a public health insurance in the Dominican Republic that covers a significant portion of the population with fewer resources.
[35] Participant keeps calling me professor and the workshop sessions they call "class"

> ladies and gentlemen, here [in the Dominican Republic], there is often help available, and simply because [the communities] do not approach them with adequate knowledge, the help offered does not meet its social demand. So, it is crucial that every time we take action, we try to make a document as exhaustive as possible, that is, as complete as possible. A report should say: look, we have 20 cases; a percentage of these cases are in an advanced stage, another is halfway, and others are just starting, etc.

Increasing the agency capacity of a body like the Neighborhood Board of El Progreso implies, beyond a good and precise diagnosis, having a set of action possibilities when requesting third parties for any intervention in the community. This, in turn, implies knowing, as a community governing body, the cartography of public and private institutions that deal with or can deal with the problems to be solved in the community. That is why I have included in the intervention contained in the previous paragraph the requirement of first being able to know the instances to which we can turn.

Also, the need to have a report as complete as possible of the situation to be intervened: a description of the reality, consequences on the community, quality and quantity of people affected, and rights not respected. I also point out that they should immediately get an answer or a solution from the authorities or institutions they visit. The Neighborhood Council should bring, along with the claims, feasible and sustainable solutions, among other information, that can be turned to look at and react to the situation in the complete way possible. I told them it is better to write and speak in a language the institutions will understand in these reports and negotiations.

Knowing how to talk to public power allows for an adequate interpretation of the deficiencies of a given aspect to be fixed or makes them aware of any inconsistencies in their responsibilities in the community. For this reason, as a joke, I gave the following example so that

rigor would prevail in the Neighborhood Board when preparing the conversation with the established powers or instances of collaboration:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** And the issue of prevention, here is a problem that touches me a lot as a sociologist- Ladies and gentlemen, if you go to the Santo Domingo Metro, not necessarily in the metro people behave like they do on the corner of their house, why? Because when you go to work, you do not behave like you behave at home. Let's imagine, Juan, that you are in a dining room in your house; you take off your shirt, start eating, and even burp because no one is watching you. And, of course, if President Abinader[36] invites you to eat at his house, you put on a suit.
>
> **Juan:** Of course (laughs).
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** What if Abinader invites you to his house?
>
> **Juan:** I have to be neat.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Exactly, you adapt to the protocol. So, my friends, the same thing happens in this type of exercise: we have to live up to what is expected of a third party who can come here to do a job. We need to bring the maximum quality of what we deliver, right? What do you think?

The group agreed with their heads. A consensus was reached among participants.

<u>Rebuilding the imagination. Future exercises.</u>

At the end of X's intervention, it was evident that time was running out, and we were not going to have the possibility of having a second presentation by group. So, here came the moment to imagine feasible projects that could promise us a different and better community. It was about

[36] The current president of the Dominican Republic.

thinking of the beautiful, organized, dignified community that everyone dreamed of, bringing it to the present in the form of images, but above all, it was about viable actions within the reach of the Neighborhood Council.

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** I dream of this country, for example. I will give you an example of billboards with educational information close to public transportation stops. For instance, we have an everyday vocabulary that we must improve; we have a short, reduced vocabulary. So, if we put words in public places that will change every week, people will at least have something to entertain themselves with while in the car, waiting for the traffic light that changes, or being on a bus. So, how many people are going to pass through that panel? What is it called on Respaldo Sagrario Díaz, on Josefa Passage, or the one near your house?
>
> **Junior:** The Sagrario pedestrian street.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Exactly, can you imagine there is...? Juan, let's dream, let's dream a little, let's use our imagination: What would happen if we changed, if we posted six billboards here at El Progreso, one on the center court, other ones at the entry/exits, and maybe in some strategic place where you say: "this is where most people pass by" and that you start a prevention campaign against diabetes? So, first, you explain what diabetes is, how diabetes is treated, and how many community members may have diabetes [without knowing]. Anything, such as a contact number: If you have someone with diabetes in your home, dial this number. Do you understand me? You either send four messages to a communal WhatsApp or keep changing them. There is an impact that we can make here. Look, the Dominican, you know, the saying that we are “lawless scapegoats” means we live with no law (nor the law respect us nor with respect law). So, distrust has been created in us.

I was trying to make the point with my project’s partners about how important it is to think that such measures not only may have a direct effect on the concrete subject with which the measure taken is dealing but also have other effects on critical and strategic goals such as fostering

people's trust in the community (therefore in hope about their future, both personal and social) through successful local actions made by an institution as the Neighborhood Council. Any politics of the vicinity is a policy: a concrete action that searches to address a given problem. Still, it is also an artifact or mechanism for community building that should not be underestimated. That is why I put the example, once again, about the older woman who died recently and how the Neighborhood Council reacted to it. It is essential to recognize and award such actions. This is the exchange that came from it:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** The first step to strengthening the community element is for them to see what the Neighborhood Council is doing. I came the other day and saw how José dealt with the situation we had last week when I was with you, Santo. You were looking for the notarial act, trying to reach a lawyer, the sworn statement, the hearse, the grave, the transfer, all that of that lady who passed away.
>
> **Participant:** Ah, but when my mother died, José also went looking for a medical examiner.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** You and three or four others experienced the same. […] What Juan did represent a person, but he is [actually also] an institution, just like we all are. So, those are essential community elements for rebuilding a common faith. A shared faith is a hope that the Neighborhood Council is worth working on.
>
> **José:** I don't want to tell you, but everyone who has died here in the sector, I have had to go to INACIF[37] to look for a forensic team…
>
> At that point, the participants were very excited, mentioning different possibilities as if a big door had opened to the imagination.
>
> **Fidias:** The Neighborhood Board can take action in citizen education and prevention, and we can announce talks beforehand in the Church.

[37] National Institute of Forensic Sciences, agencies responsible for removing lifeless bodies from homes or public roads.

Juan Miguel Pérez: There are strategies to guide people towards that talk.

Fidias: Bring a diabetes specialist or nutritionist who can give a talk on how to avoid diabetes so that prediabetics can change their situation and learn about it.

Participant: I have had a good relationship with Promise's director for many years, long before he was there. Based on what Fidel says, I will investigate what kind of talk they have about diabetes prevention. I will ask.

Participant: A campaign against noise [is also needed]!

Juan Miguel Pérez: Against noise, respect for the rights of others, for example, suitable? Then, the young people will come and tell them, "Yes, but we want to exercise," for example.

Participant: The same issue with older people, care for older people, many people are unaware of this, that there are resources for that…

The workshop ended with this last intervention and a motivation:

Juan Miguel Pérez: Have you not seen an awareness campaign about the treatment of animals? That says, "A dog and a cat feel the same as you, do not abandon them," and you do not remember a song, who was it by? by Kinito Méndez with Juan Lockward[38], a very well-known singer who was raising awareness among people about the treatment of older people. So, ladies and gentlemen, look, I promised you we would finish relatively early today, unlike other times when we extended ourselves a little more. I want the satisfaction questionnaires we fill out at the end to be filled out calmly. We are going to dedicate a time

[38] I refer to a campaign favoring older people's rights to be treated well, protagonists by two famous Dominican musicians

to that. Look, I have two proposals for you. Our first proposal is that we usually would have our fourth workshop […] You consider it that the next seminar we dedicate to address the problems we saw the other day more or less in this way, in this format of today, and I wanted to do that work with you as a model so that the couples can work on it. [For example], X called me, and I immediately answered her call. We had to coordinate with R and work with] R, even via WhatsApp, video calls, and a conference. This is technological, and this helps a lot, and we did it. So we don't have to meet physically. Each group can call me and organize a video call; we didn't even last half an hour or 25 minutes.

Closing remarks

The general balance that I draw from this third workshop is self-explanatory through the transcripts presented in this chapter comparatively to the previous ones: the more participation the participants have, the closer we get to the objective of the specific session and the workshop in general: progressive empowerment of the members of the Neighborhood Board, based on reflection (the knowledge that is reconstructed) in the community about their problems, ethically motivated (the common good) and informed disposition (based on the principle of equity) to carry it out.

What is significant here to highlight is the quality of that participation. In a dialectical process, the workshop dynamics occurred without problems, as if the path to pragmatist truth were there in that concrete reality that we were gradually progressively clearing based on the exchanges that were taking place. Each statement by the participants (clarification, deepening of a topic, variation of a problem, examples provided) was a beam being placed for a bridge under construction, from which to cross the river of inertia, immobilization, and hopelessness. To foster through an action that had a consequence on reality, in this case, the meeting, the concepts, the method, and its implementation gradually affected the original inert attitude. The participants became more and more present.

In short, in the first workshop, we learned together the essential notions of community in the context of poverty, of dignity as a condition and ideal, of social justice (and its opposite, injustice), of local democracy; in the second workshop, more than learning statistics, we confronted them with the truth of the experiences of the participants. This allowed us to enter into a reasoned cartography of the most collective community problems. In the third workshop, already empowered with notions and understanding of realities, we began to challenge reality, imagining the path to its improvement.

From the idea of social change, imagination became a work in progress, making the session the first phase of change, as seen in the attitude and empowerment I witnessed from the participants. Likewise, the workshop was nourished by reflections on development and how state agencies organize their policies and social interventions. This was fundamental to inform the participants of the language used by power (and how it is organized), a crucial element in putting together a community response and increasing the agency capacity of the Neighborhood Board.

A review of the responses provided by the participants in the satisfaction questionnaire, filled out at the end of the third session, should have warned me of fundamental elements to change compared to what was initially planned in the upcoming fourth workshop. Instead, it confirms a good acceptance by the participants of the course of events. It should be noted that, regarding possible dropouts by some participants, two participants needed to be registered as such but attended the second one simply out of curiosity. These two had even strangely requested money, not necessarily because they needed it for a fundamental reason. I had been warned that these two people might have come to the second session with intentions other than the workshop ones. We did not have to say or do anything. They did not return to the workshops after session two because the seminar was unconcerned with their interests. The issue of time was another concern that has

dissipated in this third session. There continues to be a good overall assessment of how the facilitator presented and conducted the workshop and a recognition of the participants towards the exercises of their peers. Here are the participants' answers to the questions asked.

How did you feel in class today?

1. Very good
2. Excellent
3. Every day, I learn something exciting and important to the community. City
4. Excellently good
5. I did well for the first time and liked it. I learned things I didn't know
6. Good
7. Very good
8. Good
9. Very happy
10. Very good
11. Good
12. Very good
13. Very good. Motivated to continue working for the community
14. Very good
15. Good
16. Very good, everything is excellent

What did you learn most from today's class?

1. How to improve the quality of life. Development and social change are achieved together, united.
2. That unity is strength.
3. The part of our right as citizens and always acting in community with others
4. Human unity
5. I learned something I didn't know about diabetes: how to heal oneself.
6. The correct way to present problems
7. The issue of health
8. Respecting the message is essential to achieving change, and that change is in and with people.
9. The vision of the community from the point of view of sociology
10. The knowledge of the power we have if we unite
11. The presentation of the work of X and R
12. Information about diabetes
13. The relationship between the community and social justice in social change
14. Many things. Teaching
15. Punctuality
16. Like all the things the gentleman said

What did you like most about today's class?

1. Social justice to change humanity, such as changing people's living conditions
2. The topic of health
3. Interaction and exchange with classmates
4. Everything
5. I learned many things I didn't know
6. Punctuality
7. Regarding the multi-year plan, change management
8. [the workshop] was exact, with suitable examples. [Learned how to] know how to work and enter into a problem or topic we come across with.
9. The class was very participatory, and the facilitator had excellent command.
10. The dynamism
11. The learning that we have acquired
12. The social system
13. Participation of people
14. The talk
15. The way of explaining
16. Everything makes sense, and I like it a lot

Is there anything you felt uncomfortable with in today's class?

1. N/A
2. No
3. Everything is perfect
4. Everything is good
5. oO, everything is good; I enjoyed learning
6. Nothing
7. Nothing
8. Not everything is good
9. Nothing
10. Nothing
11. I have no complaints
12. Nothing
13. Nothing
14. No
15. Nothing
16. No, everything is perfect

Do you have any recommendations or comments on improving something in the class?

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. More participation from the members

4. Not everything is good
5. More youth is needed, and every day, I will learn something new
6. Continue being punctual
7. Everything is excellent
8. Everything is good
9. It would be a great help if the projected presentation could be read
10. Nothing
11. Punctuality, above all
12. Someone in the community who does not have insurance could help her
13. None
14. None
15. Nothing more
16. Not for now

Chapter 8: Workshop 4: Reconstructing social action and imagination

Workshop 4: Once the problems and reactions of the Neighborhood Council were identified, a fourth workshop would be dedicated to organizing the action itself. This workshop will discuss how the Neighborhood Board will be organized before the instances or institutions outside it. The goal was to rebuild together the organization and planning of social action, that is, its capacity for agency as an organ.

The original plan for organizing the workshops was to dedicate the third session to discussing the problems and formulating possible solutions. The fourth session will organize the Neighborhood Council's action in response to the agreed-upon solutions. However, the truth that projected the reality found in the fieldwork and the principles of time optimization and pedagogical effectiveness guided us in a somewhat different direction for the fourth workshop. The fieldwork would yield much greater richness than any idea or plan conceived initially.

At the end of each workshop, I let two- or three days pass to mature my reflection on what I had experienced in the previous workshop and think about improvements or innovations for the next one. It was about thinking critically about what was initially planned in light of a social reality, indicating the need for adjustments. Thus, looking at the richness of the discussions and considering the limited time factor, it was necessary to privilege the depth in the treatment of the topics instead of wanting to cover all the presentations from the groups formed in the second session. This is for two essential reasons: on the one hand, the levels of knowledge produced by allowing a topic to be developed exhaustively were of an extraordinary richness that did not

deserve to be sacrificed under any circumstances. In addition, going deeper into a topic promoted a more precise and sustained dialogue between the participants, allowing more exchanges and each time of higher quality.

During the third workshop, I realized that a single topic treated with due time allowed me to build a more pedagogical and investigative process of reconstructing meanings based on a debate of statements, replies, and counter-replies (rarely contradictory but complementary). Thus, A topic was allowed to be seen from the most significant number of possible angles on the stage, where participants, with more time to express themselves passively or actively, could be challenged by what was said or intervened according to their learning times, personalities, and interests. Each variant presented by the facilitator or the participants as reactions to the group presentation implied new information from the same topic, allowing the group members to progress in their understanding. As there was practically no dissent between one point of view and another, but rather each of the contributions was a piece of a puzzle that was being completed, helped the concentration of the participants' attention (didactic side) and at the same time allowed for a density of the inquiry process.

If we had proceeded with the original plan of presenting the nine groups, we would have needed more time to consume knowledge from those who presented and not to co-produce it in the community. With enough time, we moved from a clientelist version of knowledge, or a banking version, to use Freire's term, to a version authorized by the collective intellectual forming the group.

Furthermore, from a pragmatic perspective, dualities in actions are often fictitious, and wanting to separate one process from another is often more of an intellectual artifice than an authentic reproduction of what occurs in the reality of social subjects. Without a doubt, a question of time forced me to review the original plan to optimize the limited resources. But also separating the discussion of the problem from its possible action broke with the naturalness and spontaneity that I observed in the third workshop. There, the participants presented the problem, discussed it, drew conclusions, and considered possible solutions, providing measures or resources available for a social action such as a Neighborhood Council in this regard.

The lessons from the third workshop allowed me to verify this situation, so I agreed with the group members to work on one or two topics in the fourth workshop, seeking to refine the results obtained in the past session. Likewise, I discovered that only some groups could work on their homework. This allowed me to avoid making them feel in trouble if they had not done the exercise previously, which could have caused some social embarrassment that would make them prefer not to come to the session. When I proposed that only two topics would be presented, many of the members of the other groups expressed their gratitude, citing personal problems during the week or needing to understand the exercise first from other groups fully.

Rebuilding the learning dynamic

One of my biggest concerns throughout the workshop was how the different vicissitudes and rhythms of life that the participants faced daily could generate distractions between

workshops. A week was long, and I worried about any participants' concerns and occupations. How could we re-connect the participants' dynamics and attention to the project's learnings at the beginning of the fourth workshop?

As a strategy, I began by questioning the participants about their weeks and how they had gone: their realities and what they learned from them during the week. It was a way of reintroducing ourselves to the dynamics of adult pedagogy as a reflective process about life. Here is the exchange:

Juan Miguel Pérez: How do you feel, ladies and gentlemen?
Participant 1: Good. Good.
Juan Miguel Pérez: How is everything going? How have your lives been?
Participant 1: Good, thank God.
Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes? And what did you learn again today? For example, I don't know, for example, let's say, S, what did you learn today?
Participant 3: Well, eh...
Juan Miguel Pérez: Something...
Participant 3: Life brings you things you learn the same day you open your eyes.
Juan Miguel Pérez: And can you tell me one of them?
Santo: Well, today?
Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes.
Participant 3: Well, when I went to my house, I saw my mother committing herself a lot, and that satisfied me.
Juan Miguel Pérez: Okay, and what do you learn from that?
Participant 3: Well, you have to love because what you love you have inside. There are people to whom you give love; that is why you have more love.

The participant's intervention contributed to the effort produced in workshop one when the exercise inspired by Mauss' definition of a community allowed the seminar to understand that

feelings are also a community's wealth and driving force. That intervention from S allows assigning an important rank of value to a feeling that is usually only practiced with minimal recognition from a culture where, paradoxically, affection is fundamental. It is also essential to know how affections are refuges and resources with which these inhabitants manage to survive their material tribulations. In summary, here, the intervention makes visible three dimensions of reality: the recognition of love as a reality of the community, the knowledge of love as a driving force of the community, and the recognition of love and care as a resource and policy of the community and the inhabitants in their private environments. For a dominating masculine culture such as the Dominican, where the male traditional pattern of behavior is usually harsh, this perspective from a man was a significant contribution of sensitivity for the group.

The dynamic continued with my interventions to relaunch the process and warm up the intellectual attention of participants. Other great moments were to come:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** And who else can tell me something they learned? I address the group: Most of the time, a great source of learning comes from daily experience and, at other times, from adversity. You often have adverse conditions where you get the most out of the lesson. So, I wonder if anyone has any of these. Let's see…
>
> **Participant 4:** Well, it turns out that I had to go to the doctor, right? So, it was a public place they recommended to me, and they told me, "Well, to go there, be prepared because it's going to take you the whole day there. You have to go at 6:00 AM or 5:00 AM." I said: "Well, I can't go that early because I have other things to do." I arrived at 9:00 AM, and there was a very long line. I went, and they asked me if I had medical insurance. I answered yes, I have private insurance. So, they assigned me a date to come back for my appointment. I was leaving, and a lady saw me and said, "Wow, didn't you get here just now? And what

happened?" I answered yes, I don't know, they sent me here. I arrived, and they scheduled my appointment within a week. The lady replied, "A week? Because the appointments are scheduled here months and months later!" I remembered you, Juan Miguel, about inequality.

The participant referred to inequality in treatment in a hospital center depending on whether you have private or public health insurance. The fact that a participant extracts in his daily life and from his daily experiences a reflection that has been mentioned in the workshop shows the potential of the project in terms of how one of the participants brings meaning to his life, from his day-to-day, with the concepts worked on in the workshop, and where he parallels concrete examples that materialize the abstraction worked on.

Another participant points out other lessons learned in their week…

Participant 5: And another thing: Confidence…

Juan Miguel Pérez: That's a key little word...!

Participant 5: Confidence…. indeed!

Juan Miguel Pérez: …Key, we've been discussing it.

Participant 5: If one doesn't have faith and the certainty that one will achieve it, one won't.

Juan Miguel Pérez: But look, one of the biggest problems is the unequal distribution of people's confidence. And that's why some are more insecure than others. And some, for example, sometimes resort to violence precisely because they don't trust that things can go a certain way.

Juan Miguel Pérez: H, you please.

Participant 6: One must learn not only to learn but also to relearn what one has already learned, always keeping this in mind. I live daily, walk the streets, and practice being empathetic, tolerant, and accepting of others, for instance, in heavy traffic on the roads.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes…

Participant 6: One must also give in and be tolerant of the motorcyclists and others.

The examples followed one after another in which the participants brought up their daily lives, nourished by the workshop's reflection. That is one of the elements that come to light with a certain clarity once transformed into facts: the project made the sessions very particular spaces where reflection could take place on the life that was just lived the day or the past days in their existences. It was like a space secure to cushion life's difficulties with reflection. We were in a church, and coincidentally, the project transformed the experiment for moments into a kind of clinical session where stress caused by unconscious confusions (rarely challenged or just reflected alone, nor socially shared) was redeemed through the liberation of the word and the reconstruction of truth.

Like that biblical saying that the truth liberates, or how freedom is obtained, as a feeling, from releasing the feeling through the spoken word, and more so the word that is said without fear, supported by previous knowledge that legitimizes it and enables it to be not only said but heard and discussed as a contribution to a general reflection. That atmosphere enabled a feeling of confidence among the participants. It was a laboratory that transformed experiences into ideas,

converting existences subject to the contingency of life in poverty into words, conceptual examples, and finally into collective thoughts.

Other participants referred to less circumstantial episodes, more characteristic of their personalities or lasting elements. The session had become a space to share elements that were previously only experienced. As one of the participants told me at the end of the workshop, this reaffirmed personal attitudes that were now recognized as "good and valid" simply because they were mentioned and supported in the workshop. Here is one of the exchanges in this direction:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Ok, ok. Now, Enrique, your turn.
>
> **Enrique:** I learned to control my emotions. I lost my energy while lying down, which made me very strange. It disappeared, and I knew I had to take it calmly and gently. There was an electricity shutdown problem. Then electricity power came back when God wanted, but I took it calmly, which is not shared.

Reflecting on the life that is lived. Sociological self-analysis and moral perfectionism.

To resume everything that was said in the spontaneous participations that arose and that I have just mentioned, and as an element of synthesis to combine the testimonial with the concepts that give meaning to the participants' stories, I planned to exhaust a turn in which I could connect several central ideas of the project, especially in terms of transformative objectives and mechanisms to reach them. The essential thing was to do it through my life experience, just as they had done over their week. I took the case of the evolution of my academic training and how it had widely influenced the project proposal in which we were involved.

It was a legitimate and legitimizing way of highlighting the pedagogical aspect that every life has a latent moral perfectionism in those who live it and how to use a sociology tool, self-analysis, to help us understand the world and ourselves in it. Note that all the interventions mentioned here highlighted the relationship between the person and their environment, and understanding the world and oneself was part of the same story.

The idea was to continue to awaken the appetite for knowledge of oneself and the other through knowing the other (sociology) and, ultimately, to know oneself as if one were another, a very Durkheimian approach for studying social phenomena as life is "as things." Similarly, I intended to have an intervention with which to sensitize the participants to the fact that the project, in addition to sociology (better knowing the neighborhood and its habitants) and neighborhood policy (contributing to the improvement of the area), was an adult education project, whose precepts (essentially of democratic leadership) would be the channels or means through which to carry out social action both at a personal and community level. My intervention falls within this double dimension. I will explain here in extenso what was said:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** […] look, adult pedagogy, listen to this. Listen to my personal experience that I want to share with you. I studied political science, which was the first thing I did. Why do you study political science? Listen carefully to the colleagues who have partisan politics experiences here. Political Science is how you govern a country through law because the laws make the rules. Still, they also teach you economics and how things are produced and give you a history to provide you with awareness of how societies have worked.
>
> Well, it turns out that I was not very happy with how they taught me because I said, "Well, here they teach you how to govern, but they do not necessarily teach you the point of view of those who are governed. That is, of the governed, and so I turned to sociology and what

sociology taught me was how to understand people and how many times people do not let themselves be governed and how many times public policies, no matter how well-intentioned, if they do not know the people to whom they are going to be applied, will fail. So, sociology gave me that sensitivity. But then I also asked myself, “Well, how do you make the change? I mean, how can you act in life? Knowing the problem, how can you solve it?” So, I turned to education as the exercise through which you can have a different approach to the person you are trying to accompany. To practice something new with them.

Every change means something new; every exchange implies a practice of transformation. If we have the tradition of throwing garbage at the floor and want that to change, it will mean not only that we no longer throw garbage there, but we have to see what mechanisms we use so that throwing garbage there has a substitute, for example, a garbage can. So, the result will be the final change. However, there is an initial process in which one tries to make things slightly different, where change begins. Looking at the same problem in the same way will not help us solve anything.

So, adult education for community change is about learning how to know the community as best as possible (what needs to be changed) and gathering all the potential forces of a community to try to achieve a change. And for that, specific strategies are given. One of these strategies involves people's lives as knowledge (informational, conceptual, experiential, etc.). In this project, we want to study it in a moment and place where one is not living ordinarily (like when walking in the streets or working) but instead trying to understand what is being lived outside workshops. A straightforward example is when we are, for example, taking a public car and paying for the public vehicle, and we want to avoid being picked on. So, what happens when that happens? One tries to concentrate on what one is experiencing, but there have to be spaces like that, far from the concern of living, so that we can then think about what happens when one lives an experience, what happens, how it happens, why it happens, could we improve those things? Luckily, we are sitting here to be able to think about what people experience, including our own experiences. What a great privilege! Within that perspective, thinking about what people experience is essential to formulating new ways of conceiving change.

> So, what happens? I want to verify the fundamental issue of our problems with you today. This is the penultimate workshop. We had said that there were going to be four, but, really, due to the time it takes, we are going to conclude with a final one next week, which is where we are going to make a final reflection and, above all we are going to dedicate it to working on the topic of democratic leadership, which is how we can apply in the exercise of community leadership, educational techniques, the technique of education, do you know what they are? They are easy…

Participants paid attention to all I was saying. I exchanged permanently with them, asking if they were following me and understanding the issues presented. I continue:

> **The strategies are as follows:** How can I enter with their reasons and interests, and after building a joint venture with theirs and mine, do we all leave with our own? Warning: All this, without implying any manipulation, because we are talking about ethical principles that guide community action; what do ethical principles mean? That seek the common good, then, I would like to begin, if possible, […] with the other presentation on screen, and I would like to tell V and M to come over here, please, so that they can present to us their work…

Structuring the problem.

To carry out the presentations, I gave the participants a simple outline from which to work on them. Thus, each group had the task of working on the following outline: (1) Title of the problem; (2) Description of the problem; (3) Consequences of the problem; (4) Possible causes of the problem; (5) Possible proposals to solve the problem. Although we already did that exercise in the third session, both groups that intervened would improve the practice considerably in the fourth session. In both cases, the presentations, especially in the first one, which benefited from more time for presentation, were presented with exceptional communicative clarity and cleanliness in

its organization. I could sit with the group to collaborate in preparing the presentation, which seemed an essential step for future recommendations. Here is the first group intervention:

> **Participant V:** The name of the social problem of the community of the El Progreso sector that we were involved in (1) Noise pollution and strategies to reach youth.
>
> (2) Description of the problem: First, how it affects the community and the peoples' rights. Include some data from SIUBEN or another, if it exists. In the definition of the problem as a community interest, we have that the El Progreso sector, according to the statistics of SIUBEN, as well as the own account of its inhabitants, belongs to a socioeconomic stratum in general conditions of poverty, as occurs in the majority of the territories of the country. With these social conditions, according to the inhabitants, one of the most common practices is noise pollution, which, added to the overcrowding conditions of the sector, causes disturbances due to excessive noise to be even more prevalent than in other sectors. Most of the time, the most important source of noise pollution occurs in the community's public spaces through remote-controlled speakers that project loud music, especially on weekends and days of rest for the inhabitants.
>
> (3) How does it affect the community and the rights of its members and the community members? The community of El Progreso is composed, for the most part, of workers whose work is highly demanding both physically and psychologically in their ordinary workdays. Having permanent noise pollution, precisely on days when they can rest and sometimes when they have to study, aggravates their living conditions. Even within their private homes, silence is a resource, almost like a right for rest and social peace. Calls made to those responsible for this pollution usually generate conflicts and unrest in the sector, adding to the impotence and defenselessness of people seeing these practices with total impunity despite specific interventions by the Police that do not result in significant effects. In other words, there are no consequences when people call the police, and everything stays there. Nobody says anything even if we [the Neighborhood Council] call these people's

attention. Sometimes, some lower the volume; other times, they don't. And that is something that affects us as a community.

(4) Possible causes and community collateral consequences of the problem: Young people often seek to attract attention in social spaces such as the neighborhood. The neighborhood's inhabitants, especially the young population, usually suffer from a lack of opportunities and respect for their rights, consequently deteriorating their status as citizens. For many of these young people, loud music represents an identity or form of expression and presence.

This situation divides the community because, although the parents of these young people are called to attention, nothing much is resolved. This creates problems of impasses and differences that erode the community spirit in the area. In addition, when the affected people call the parents' attention or directly to the young people, they become unfriendly and look for problems. This divides the community because one group is against these practices and another is in favor, so something must be found, an intermediate solution between them, among the possible proposals.

The presentation goes smoothly. People pay attention to the screen where the presentation is projected or the presenters.

(5) Possible proposals to solve the problem, from actions oriented as a community, from the neighborhood council. It also takes into account the principles of social dignity and democracy. Well, one strategy is not to prohibit music but to convince the inhabitants of respect for the rights of others and the sociability of listening to music without turning it into noise pollution. Among the actions I have proposed are awareness activities about the consequences for the health and social peace of the sector and setting agreed schedules for such purposes.

The class was impressed by the presentation made by V and M, although V was the one who spoke essentially. So, I had to lead what would be an active exchange between everyone in the group:

Juan Miguel Pérez: Well, thank you very much. Look what happens. This is very important because we worked on how to look at the issue from a social perspective. That is why we first applied the principle of trying to understand the problem. We can better look for solutions, but going to the essential point, what is the crucial point to not make the same mistake politicians make when they don't know where their policies will end up? The fundamental problem with music is that it is a form of expression. So, just like when we want to talk, right? We want to talk, but now the educator wants to bet on that person speaking correctly or without attacking someone's dignity. So, music per se is not a problem because the youth, all of us, I'm going to, for example, I don't know, here I think the average age is 50, 60 years or so. I imagine they were all in their eighties here; they were all big consumers of the El Show del Mediodía[39] here, you know? And now they were, I don't know, did they change the name?

Participant: It is still called El Show del Mediodía, but there are different people.

The question arises about the source of the problem. Some say people from outside El Progreso bring in that loud music. Some intervene and point out that although that element exists, the problem's essence originates with actors from the industry. The truth is verified and established in the following way:

Participant: And as for the work done, where does it tell me the possible causes and collateral consequences of the problem? In this, I sat down to observe where the music itself does not affect, that is, the noise, but the collaterals are harmful; those who come

[39] A very popular Dominican TV show with lots of music and comedies.

[from outside the neighborhood] are the ones who do the damage because those from here, sometimes one can control them.

Juan Miguel Pérez: No, but I was saying that the problems are not there directly, but they said that they come from other places. Because that was what they told me, and that is true. I mean, Milagros told me that they came from other places. But she tells me that the sources are still from here because someone has to bring them.

Participant: Correct, that is accurate and valid. The primary sources are local, but that one controls them at a particular moment.

Another participant intervenes and adds a complaint that includes a cultural tradition, such as mourning, that the young generation apparently does not respect:

Participant: I was born and raised in the countryside. I have been living in the capital for a few years, and I was shocked to see that people die in the sector. I hear music in the neighborhood and say, "Wow, I see that someone from here died, and they do not care to play music."

For his part, another of the participants talks about the complex situation that involves controlling music, especially when the music comes from the neighborhood's commercial establishments. They come back, and some divergences arise about the origin of the problem, but the differences are soon consensus:

Participant: […] Look at me, it is essential. […] I was talking today with a lawyer expert in this matter in his office […] a deadline was published that is given to those who already have a complaint, to those grocery stores and places that have a complaint they provide a period of, I think 15 days so that it is not repeated, because otherwise there will be fines and sanctions. […]

Then, one of the participants, a lawyer, says that three institutions are involved in a complaint, which prevents them from proceeding and coordinating appropriately. And that when a complaint is filed, there are no appropriate protocols. Three trips must be made to three different state agencies—a fundamental problem for a body like the Neighborhood Council, where all members are volunteers. The members of the Council know the situation on their own. Acting together in an assembly begins to at least raise the problem as such. Here, the group is in a very dynamic process of inquiry.

> **Participant:** [For the problem of noise pollution] The police are not prepared for that matter. Law 64-00 dictates the creation of a special police force for that because there are three institutions involved: the Environmental Attorney, who is not in the Environment Department here in Luperón but is at the 5th Centenario, the hotel on the Malecón[40], where the Attorney General's Office is located, the National District City Hall as head of public spaces, and the Police, which is not created or authorized yet for that situation, intervene. While those three do not agree, unfortunately, we will not know where noise can be made, where it cannot be made, and where it is allowed. In Malecón, there are places where you can make as much noise as you want, but a particular place requires a specific permit issued by the Environment Department. But I'll leave that because the professor told me I had to be brief.

Another point is the material difficulty, not just the procedural difficulty of dealing with the issue; with new technologies, locating equipment and confiscating it is becoming increasingly difficult.

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** But look how interesting what you say is. I will explain the importance of the Neighborhood Council. According to what you told me in the initial

[40] Luperón, 5th Centenario, and Malecón are three locations in Santo Domingo that are very far from each other and to the El Progreso area.

interviews, the situation has changed because they are no longer necessarily fixed centers where they play the music. Now, with a little speaker that used to be giant, a small thing can amplify the sound extraordinarily. A guy about 20 or 30 meters away with a cell phone turns it off and on, turns it on when the police are not there, and when the police come, they pay for it.

Participant: It's out there on TikTok. I saw that they put a speaker on a light pole up there, and from there, they said to the police, defying it: "Come and take it away if you can..."

Juan Miguel Pérez: Well, then, that was what you told me: The police come, and if they see it, they turn it off.

Participant: Someone else takes the horn, and there is no way out.

There comes a time when, in the tour of interventions by the participants, the topic is enriched or diluted in information that informs but may distract its road toward new knowledge about reality. Reality can be challenged there by simply descriptively showing better ways, naming the current's unjust causes, harmful results, or improvement points. On a few occasions, I had to intervene to redirect the debates and interventions in a sociologically informed direction, and with the rigor of pragmatism, concentrating on those elements of cause and effect that could be susceptible to becoming a change democratically viable, fair, and sustainable. For such purposes, the parliament between participants must avoid confusing accessorial issues with the main ones or taking results as causes and causes as effects; something is commonly done and to what social sciences usually can contribute with by precise one and others.

That is the significant contribution a sociologically informed pragmatism can make in such a context. In the case of noise pollution, the debate has yet to advance enough, and reports on the causes are already known with some precision. But the essential remains there, it seemed to me.

So, I wanted to intervene to contribute with an idea taken from sociology: from a democratic point of view, all the actors involved in the situation with loud music have rights (some to have fun, especially in contexts of poverty; others to rest, also necessary in contexts of poverty).

Both are different ways of occupying leisure time. Some live one young stage of their life, others a more mature stage. It is all about understanding oneself and finding a balance point among everyone. Moreover, after assuming all that has been said, such as the difficulty that law enforcement has, it is necessary that those we point out as problematic or part of the problem also become part of a possible solution. The situation is structural, and it is essential to think about the issue integrally, not just repression, which will always be infertile in terms of the reaction it may have from the young populations in the sector. So, I address the following commentary:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Because it is a little speaker, you can hide it anywhere. So, what happens? Listen carefully; that is the first thing. That is already a challenge for the ordinary way the police intervene because you can imagine the impotence of things continuing to be the same. And the young even make fun of you on your face. But look at something, gentlemen. […]. What happens is that our police come to seize those. First, there are many businesses to control all of them. But the important thing is that they come to communities where everyone is tired. The police are tired of intervening, the people who suffer from noise pollution are exhausted, and those who put on the music are also, more than anyone else, tired; that is why they play music to kill boredom. So, this is where sociology comes in: to try to put ourselves in the other's shoes because it is straightforward for us to say, "There is only one way," those kids have that for a reason; it is a way of expression. So, we will not be able to solve the problem until we include those who cause the pollution as part of the solution. If we reject and say no, it is only the police that have to come, and that's it. An affair that will never end, never. So, this is where the importance of social organization comes in.

I ended my intervention with a joke: *If I were president of the Republic, the first thing I would do would be…* I then started assigning functions to different participants as if they were government officials. Everyone laughed. This gave participants a taste of being in public office and charge of responsibilities. They enjoy these moments of dreaming of better days and bringing betterment to their community.

A comprehensive and compassionate social action. Towards a vicinity policy.

Regarding the attitude of rejection towards the populations that cause noise pollution, in this fourth workshop, after the presentation, the position gradually changed towards a more comprehensive one. Initially, the participant's body language, with a majority favoring a solely repressive measure, begins to give way to a more negotiated solution. The incorporation of a principle of democratic response, starting from pedagogical principles in social action, became a crucial goal. Meanwhile, participation is sustained in a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere.

At this moment, I justify the existence of the Neighborhood Council as an instance of accompaniment to a social order that needs to be born from the people's participation, not imposed by any force. In every Neighborhood Council, I invite the group to think and must always bet on compassion (sharing a passion or suffering). And that could be achieved through understanding the other. Here is the dialogue started:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Mediation is the strength of community organization and between public powers and the people. Because it is not the mayor's office, the mayor's office is fixing up the park and cleaning the streets, and it's OK that they do it; as long as they do

it, one is fine. However, the Neighborhood Council is called to take the reins of the issues of local mediation, the regulation of norms, respect for social laws, and all those elements. Why? Imagine, ladies and gentlemen, a man is a bit drunk and listening to music, bitter with economic situations and social marginalization. That's why he feels he is having his Sunday calmly, although not his surroundings. Suppose no people are suffering from what that man is experiencing.

The Dominican state has a tradition of a given insensitivity in its public policies. A long history of mistreatment by certain public services toward citizens usually contributes to forging an authoritarian culture among the general population. This project may sometimes be a countercultural laboratory tackling long-established traditional cultural features. In the case of El Progreso, I needed to insist to participants how important it is for dignity and local democracy to be respected in El Progreso to conceive and conduct the Neighborhood Council's politics and policies from the compassion point of view, not a repressive one.

Sometimes, I argue, police intervention is necessary. No doubt. Reality could be very violent in a barrio, and police become the safer solution, mainly for neighbors complaining about their neighbors. However, bidding on that as a first choice or even a middle-term measure can also be hazardous. Even in the case of persistent lousy music, the Neighborhood Council must have a policy based on education, not force. It will always be better to negotiate any measure taken in the neighborhood. To illustrate how public policies in the country are usually unilateral and not based on caring but on repression, I mentioned a couple of examples:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** You told me you often go to the young men [with loud music] parents, who ignore you. This also appeared frequently, but here, it is important not to discard them as part of the solution but to integrate them. Let me tell you something: I'm going there. […] From what I know, churches have their doors open to everyone because what they are

about is that they are the same as hospitals. The hospital? If you are sick, that is where they take care of you; a mistake the school makes is that they take you out when you are a terrible student. I do not understand why because that is when a person needs school the most. Can you imagine what it is to deprive a young boy of education...

Participant: They suspend him for up to a week.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Yes…I don't understand that. So here are schools that throw him out, and you know what? That boy's poor performance may have many determinants, including the school's responsibility, which is not insignificant. Schools must develop strategies to bring the students back on rail. So, yes, we have all these minor calamities that have to do with the sanitary infrastructure, that have to do with overcrowding, that have to do with not owning land, that have to do with the issue of precisely intergenerational conflict, that has to do with the issue, do you know why? Because the public authorities did not care about those things before, they became a problem. How much is not spent here on what you discussed, for example, the issue of the basketball street courts, and what if we build a nearby court? Where these kids go, we will no longer have the problem of parking, but no fields are nearby…

Participant: Not even where to make one…

Juan Miguel Pérez: Right up to here, because when they want to, they put a second floor, but there isn't one here, or for example, you said something significant the other day, a basket instructor, an instructor who avoids, for example, the case where they come and bet on games. With regular practices and an instructor who will give them a uniform, the kids will be disciplined into a dynamic.

So, these elements all lead us in the same direction: Organization. The Dominican people need to be more organized because we have been unable to have that. They still need to provide us with structures and institutions. I have seen that the Neighborhood Council is in your will, but it has yet to be a tradition. You are keeping it that way, with the memory, as

> you can. And so, I am sure it is multiplied thousands of times throughout the country because of [the inertia] of the public powers. I spoke today with a colleague and told her that the Neighborhood Council has been orphaned, they have nowhere to go, they have no support, and they are, together with the churches, the closest grassroots structures the people have. Look, this Church is in the middle of the community, where the State is not. You have to look for the firefighters, the police, and schools, far away from the community.

Common good. Ethics and the Politics of the Vicinity

Another point that I took advantage of in the dynamic, and that went far beyond the issue of noise pollution, was the issue of public spaces. This was a key issue for the community and the purposes of the workshop, although it did not come across the participants' minds. Nevertheless, it was fundamental to treat it. Here, the facilitator's role was defined by reality. I had to constantly catalog the deficits and assets and organize the time based on optimization criteria, selecting topics that could be critical around and concern an impoverished population like El Progreso.

In the subsequent intervention, I sought to provoke the topic of public good, starting with space; perhaps the most difficult of the issues due to the physical immobility was community overcrowding. Although we had already seen it in workshop number two, with the presence of SIUBEN, it was a fundamental topic to be insisted on. Public space allows me to work on the idea of the common good. We have to consider that after decades of neoliberal ideas, hearing about the common good, public service, or spaces that could be something new in a community like El Progreso can be challenging. Here is the exchange that took place:

Juan Miguel Pérez: Do you remember when we said the other day that change is made by how it is made in the community; it is made with the people, but it is made in the barrio and from the barrio.

Participant 1: I understand or have heard that the community had a basketball court.

Participant 2: Yes. You said it: It had.

Participant: They privatized the public spaces here. I have seen, I have seen that here.

Juan Miguel Pérez: People privatized it, and they built it?

Participant: Of course, that is challenging to see.

Participant: That land did not belong to the neighborhood. I knew the owner of that land; that land was private.

Participant: Yes, but there was a court there. It was a court.

Junior: No, no. The youth of that time made a court.

Participant: It even had a mango tree; it was a little hill.

Juan Miguel Pérez: But that is the problem, then. Where are the public authorities to relocate that space somewhere else? Even though it was occupied illegally, the owner asked for it, which was perfect. It was returned to her, a right or whatever. Ok. Let's assume it was like that, but public authorities should enable a new space to replace the old one. Where were they?

Here, the older participants become historians of their dispossession. They talk about the need for the state's presence to fulfill its obligation to protect the vulnerable. In an impoverished community like El Progreso, the state has the moral and legal responsibility to protect that right by taking measures. That is the Hobbesian definition of a State: to protect the vulnerable. The exchange continues:

> **Junior:** Do you know why what happened with the court happened? Because at that time, there was respect for the elders and those who were there, who were people from here, who usurped that land, knocked everything down, and took everything. The young people of that time respected many of the people.
>
> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Ok, very well, but look, sometimes disrespect is also worth it because when it is a right, you cannot respect someone who is violating your right. Still, still, because if it were the legitimate owner, one would say "Ok," but if they were not, then one had to act against it or, here I go, organize into a Neighborhood Board, organize into a Neighborhood Board, and go to the different possible instances to be able to claim a right. But that has to be presented like this: we are here demanding the rights of the Dominicans who live in this land. And you seek to always go around with a Constitution, Juan, and tell all your neighbors to go around with a constitution and to say, "Look, this is a right here to recreation, to this," and you know what? They may ignore you, but it gives one satisfaction that one claims what is legal and fundamental in the country, do you understand?

People reacted positively to this statement, starting with those in the Neighborhood Council who were more veterans. Although we debated the situation regarding loud music and the problem with the basketball court, both cases involved young people and their conflict of interest with their elders. But beyond that, although there is a predominance of solidarity in the neighborhood, nobody can deny the violence inherited from the context of poverty. Dealing with that can be

challenging and dangerous. And that may be one of the leading causes of despair: poverty conditions overwhelm people willing to change things. At this moment of this fourth session, people's frustration about the question of loud music seems to match with hopelessness about anything in their life; the sentiment of abandonment of people as habitants of land left to its sorrow. The atmosphere became dense:

> **Participant:** Yes, I wanted to say that, as you said just now, everything fell on the Neighborhood Council. There was loud music in my case, where I live and where I am most present. About a month ago, we had neighbors and friends; I introduced myself and said to him: "And can you please turn down that music a little?" And he responded: "But it is too early." I said to him: "But, this early, there are people who, perhaps, are not in a position to listen to that music. Is it possible for you to turn it down a little?" And headed: "No, you who are always struggling, who are getting involved in everything," I said to him: "Of course, you do it because we are friends, we are neighbors, and I am not going to do anything against you. But if the police come and take you away, they will come looking for me. You forget they always have to get involved in everything, as you say." But yesterday, closer to home, I went to Santos' house. It was 10:00 AM, and a Mexican dance (corridos, rancheras, norteñas, and tumbados that refer to personal success, entertainment, material ostentation, money, clothes, cars, and social recognition) continued. But I thought: "If I went to that friend who had that Mexican girl, where would he send me?" And what did I do to avoid the problem of him seeing me? Maybe he thought I was going to say something. Well, I changed the route...
>
> **Participants:** general laughter.
>
> **Participant:** I didn't go out in front of his house because I knew he would blame me if I said something, and who knows what would happen. When people like to listen to their music and drink, you must be very careful when talking to them…

Participant: There are other things. On Friday at 3:00 AM, the music was booming. I grabbed a curtain and covered it to make it less audible, but what about the other people?

Participant 1: Unfortunately, we, as a Neighborhood Council, feel tied hand and foot because confronting a person of that caliber is not easy. What happens? We live here all the time…

Juan Miguel Pérez: Of course.

Participant 1: So, confronting a person like that, one can find an enemy. I am an old man, and I walk around alone everywhere. It may be that perhaps, what is more, that same person they sent a summons from the prosecutor's office, and as a Neighborhood Board, they gave it to me, and I went to his house and took it to him. I didn't find him, so I gave it to his wife. The next day, luckily, I intelligently realized it and stood there on the corner of the grocery store. But he was carrying a stick, which was not intended to do anything good. And when he passed me by, he said, he called me, "Look, Juan, the next time you come back and bring me a summons from the Attorney General's Office, I'm going to beat you up."

Participant 2: But that was with you because I brought him one, and he didn't say anything to me.

Participant 1: To me, yes, to me, so what do I do? I don't bring him any more things.

In the final stage, I saw that there needed to be more precise conclusions. The exposure in the face of the complexity of the problem led us to a general feeling of helplessness, desperation, and resignation about the future. The last intervention, as synthesis with a load of threats and violence that some of the participants told us about the issue of noise caused by loud music in the neighborhood, reinforced defeatism. So, to generate a feeling that would bring a little calm, I made

a proposal that was within reach of the Neighborhood Council and would not risk the integrity and peace of the participants in case the idea could be carried out as a community social action:

> **Juan Miguel Pérez:** Look, the legal [issue] will never be as strong as the issue of prevention. I mean, the repressive issue, what I was saying just now, will always bring more violence. It is better to bet on prevention, and that prevention, in that case, can be generated; what happens is that you have to have a few resources for that.
>
> We talked the other day about signs because, in a community where the rules could be more precise, it will be difficult for you to ask for things, even if they are on a sign, right? "Look, it says there that you can't play music anymore," that is a valid justification, but you have to have it. Because, I mean, I was talking just now about distrust, about lawless scapegoats, we are in no man's land, the one who plays the music and the one who has the stick Is the one who imposes himself? Well no. The idea is that a process can be generated in which, little by little, they change. No matter how much it is, gentlemen, you pass by a sign ten times in one day that says: "No music after 03:00 AM", which will have some impact. If this is the way life goes, then we will say that this is something new, it is an experiment, and we do not know if it will work, but then it is preferable to try and see what can happen with it, okay? Those elements are what make one bet on something different. Change is not guaranteed, but it can generate a different process. I repeat, if here in this community there are signs that say: "Neighborhood Council," and what is said on that sign is not abusive to someone else, I believe that the Neighborhood Council will gain a lot in legitimacy in recognition of moral authority. It is not that Juan will become authoritarian, Junior, Enrique, Milagro, Xiomara, or Santo. It is not that. But if the Neighborhood Board can develop legitimacy, which is the recognition of moral authority, then I think this is important, and we should not underestimate it.

With that intervention, I also tried to invite the group to pass to the night's second and last group presentations.

When saying is doing. Communication as a social action

A person does not live by bread alone; They also do so by communicating. As we saw when addressing the concept of community as an instance essentially structured from the exchange of practices and transactions from the same cultural language, a neighborhood policy must contain communication as a principle to carry out its mission effectively and democratically. Communal communication should be one of its means and, simultaneously, a fundamental end. Communication is an end because the macro-objective of every community must be social cohesion and the participation of everyone in it. This could be achieved by having communication as an objective to achieve, improve its quality, or preserve it permanently.

Communication is also an instrument. Transforming a passive neighborhood, only a recipient and marginal in the decision-making that concerns it is a necrophiliac society that is called not to be the protagonist of its history. Communication is, therefore, the everyday means by which a community is built, but it is also the mechanism through which a community can be rebuilt. Through community action, where communication has the character of action and action, the character of communication (carries a message), can democratic leadership rebuild its legitimacy before its constituents, and can it rebuild hope in community social action in neoliberal times?

Not in vain, I insisted on several occasions and from the very beginning of the workshops on a policy that could serve as symbols of the community: a community signage policy that could indicate elements of public policies currently absent from the territory. For this reason, and as a

transition between the presentation on the problem of noise pollution and the next presentation, which would be precisely about signage, a bridge was established to signify the importance of a measure like that for any social or political action of the Neighborhood Council. In the same way, community signage would also serve, in addition to practical reasons (specific orientation and motivation), to have anthropological properties to consolidate the community spirit. Below, we have the elements of the presentation that three of the participants would use. As time was running out, and I wanted to take care of that aspect again, we read what the group had written, which was projected on the screen and commented on by me. Here is what it was presented:

> (1) Name of the problem: Absence of signs for meeting points to be used during emergencies that may arise from earthquakes, tremors, fires, and other natural or artificial disasters.
>
> (2) Description of the problem: Ladies and gentlemen, the same thing we discussed. Sometimes, contexts need evidence of organization to get into it. Can a sign play a leadership role? Yes, what we were talking about just now: educational leadership. A sign that says “Neighborhood Council: No Littering.” Look, it is not the same as if there is no sign for you to throw or not throw trash. It may be that, out of ten, five will throw it despite the sign, but there are already five who will not throw it. So, this would have to be seen. I imagine it will be the city council, too, but we will do it ourselves with a logo if it is not the city council. The idea is that the neighborhood does not wait for social action from the institutions but goes to them, knocks on the door, and puts pressure on them because those are rights. We are not asking for favors.
>
> (3) Definition of the problem: The development of the population settlement did not follow an urban design with access streets and sidewalks, but rather, the houses grew, connected by very narrow alleys for the passage of vehicles. You experience that every day, and we say that this is a disadvantage but that everything has its downside. That is an advantage.

We said that if there is no more violence or if there is no insecurity experienced in other neighborhoods, it is precisely due to overcrowding. Look at that; everything has a part; there is a downside. Shall we continue?

(4) How does it affect the community and the rights of its members and the community for the habitat form? The community lives with this limitation, but for emergency purposes that may arise, limited access is a challenge; for example, when a 901 ambulance must enter, it cannot reach the house from which the service is requested. That is an issue, ladies and gentlemen. So, you have to give people excuses to generate a process of social cohesion, bonding, and connection. To communicate. Gentlemen, you must use any excuse to approach people and say, "Look, we are doing a campaign to make people aware of how they should act." If 911 comes here, how do you tell them you, for example, and there I imagine that he will make signs with Maps, "You are here," like in the shopping mall, haven't you gone to the shopping mall where you have a sign with a dot that says you are here? If you want to go to a specific store, you must go there. You must go the other way if you want to go somewhere else. So, signaling, do you know why? It is a principle of sociolinguistics and semiotics. Sociolinguistics is the science that studies the relationship between human beings and language. Listen to what sociolinguistics says (actually, it was noted by philosopher Wittgenstein): Until something is named, it does not exist. That is, if you imagine that I say well, you, you, you, you, you (pointing to the participants), but I do not say the names. It is not the same as if I say the name. If I say "caramba," you know that there is an expression that in Dominican culture I do not have to explain to you because you have come to know what caramba[41] means, what "manganzón"[42] means, what "tigueraje" means. And those are words that an American, a Spaniard, or a Cuban may not know because they did not grow up here. It was named, so the Neighborhood Board has to be there permanently for it to exist; it has to be written as Neighborhood Board.

So, what I am telling you is very important that people see that there is a Neighborhood Council, not only in the figure of a person that I may have, even problems with that person,

[41] Words for expressing in Spanish exclamation.
[42] Different names from Dominican slang for features of personalities.

and then the Neighborhood Council if I see it in the figure of a person since I have problems with that person, it no longer exists for me, but the Neighborhood Council is all of us. So, that is very important when it comes to locating the connection of each human being with that collective entity, which is what we bet on the Neighborhood Council.

Participant: Many people in the neighborhood think that the Neighborhood Council is the president.

Juan Miguel Pérez: Exactly.

Participant: But they must remember that the Neighborhood Council comprises 19 members. Yes.

Participant: And who are those?

Participants: Laughter

Participant: I saw them once on the board at the roundabout and never again.

Participant: Well, the issue is that you are always leading everything [addressing the president of the Neighborhood Council]

Juan Peña: The problem is that I delegate it. If they do nothing, I have to comply.

Junior: Always, always, a committee is made for anything.

Juan Peña: There are 19 of us, most of whom are here.

Juan Miguel Pérez: So those, all of you are agents. You are excited about agents of work because if these are the ones who are here, who are interested, and they don't know who

the members are. Of course, there is work to do to make known who the members of the Neighborhood Council are.

Juan Peña: He is joining now [referring to a workshop participant arriving recently at the Neighborhood Council], but there are many meetings in the roundabout that we have called where the board members are meeting.

Juan Miguel Pérez: But my advice is that each member of the Neighborhood Council, as he joined it, serves more than the rest of the people. That is, "I will serve a little more than the rest. You know what? Put something in your house that says, "Member of the Neighborhood Council, how can I help you?" Because that is the one who will have contact with the committees with the outside world [just like ambassadors]. Since this barrio has so many issues, there will always be [someone to help, someone looking for help]. So, you have to tell (the community and your close neighbors] those who are members of the Neighborhood Council.

With that last intervention, I suggested a simple measure, which would give social status, that is, community prestige to a house, to a member, as if it were a badge that would be shown to the rest. At the same time, it would make the Neighborhood Council visible and located, as well as its work and the vocation of its members to community service. It would also serve in practical terms so that community members know where to turn. Since the communes did not have a place where to go within the area as a community, this type of identification would multiply the headquarters to which the inhabitants of El Progreso could refer. In any contingency or exceptional campaigns (like the vaccination during the pandemic), these places could serve as reference points to serve the community.

Closing remarks

In workshop number three, the presenting group's participation emphasized critically seizing a community problem through a communal healthcare issue. The topic was presented and discussed in workshop four, revealing many other aspects of the community's current organization that went beyond the subject question. In the discussions, the participants were much more involved in reviewing different elements of the current social order. The examination of the community elements was deepened, especially about the obstacles or difficulties that the community members would face when addressing specific issues that divide the community, such as the thorny issue of loud music, especially from the young population.

Although no concrete measures were established, a series of possibilities for action closely linked to the neighborhood and inhabitants' possibilities were discussed. As noted in this chapter's introduction, I assigned complementary and gradual learning tasks for each workshop in my original plan. The reality of their dynamics made me revisit the original plan, showing how thinking about a problem and organizing social action to address it should necessarily be done in the same exercise rather than in different sessions. The only limit found was time.

Apart from the specific topics worked on (noise pollution on the one hand and community signage on the other) and those that resulted as collateral elements of the participants' interventions, two central themes were also worked on in an underlying manner with which we concluded each presentation.

On the one hand, we took advantage of the situation of music in the community, which divides roughly two generations, to work on compassion as a constituent element of all neighborhood policy, especially in its preparatory stage.

There, I insisted on the need to always opt for prevention policies instead of repression policies, which usually generate a high cost over time, because they tend to create feelings of division and resentment between the neighbors who report and the neighbors reported, dividing neighbors between those persecuted and those who persecute. It was also mentioned how dangerous these situations can be for the members of the Neighborhood Council, as the example provided and experienced by the participants.

Compassion is built from the cultural and social understanding of the problematic situation and not necessarily from the capricious intentions of the actors causing it. Understanding a problem implies knowing its history. This understanding usually alleviates our relationship with the object in question, giving us a calm relationship with the source of stress. Thus, young people who play loud music, who are usually seen simply from the hostility that their actions tend to generate, can be contextualized and understood better within the dynamics and logic of their past and present histories, the needs from the segment of life they may be living and the social vicissitudes they may be suffering. This can generate a feeling of empathy towards them, which is the basis of any friendly relationship process to create the primary links for a possible solution to the loud music problem that could include them as part of the way out of the impasse.

Secondly, we work on communication as a structuring priority of any community seeking harmony and dignity. We take advantage of the approach to the subject of the signage plan to emphasize how a communicated and communicative community must be a priority of any neighborhood policy. If, as Mauss said, a community is essentially the quality of its exchanges, then a biophilic vision of local society must have sensitive partners who appreciate each other and

can communicate better. The participants in the project may have more responsibility than anyone else to practice this type of association built from informed empathy.

In contexts of poverty, such as those suffered by communities like El Progreso, communication also implies permanent acts or relationships of solidarity, thanks to which the scarcity of goods and services for survival is distributed and redistributed in a compensatory manner. The case of the older woman who died is an example of how communication between neighbors is essential to creating trust and protection among the members of the community.

On the other hand, communication must also be an instrument of neighborhood policy from the Neighborhood Council. Rebuilding trust will depend significantly on the Neighborhood Council's capacity to consider its people and build solutions along with the community. This will, in turn, depend on communicational action to reconstruct the history of impoverished communities, restoring the people's participation and, thus, their social dignity.

As a final announcement in the workshop, it was confirmed that for the next seminar, the fifth and last of the project, we would hold a brief closing meeting and final reflection around educational leadership as a synthesis of what was worked on in the four fundamental workshops. I also announced the visit of two state agencies had already been confirmed. They would talk with the participants about the services they provide to the citizens to explore the possibilities of working together for the good of the community. It was time to put into practice some aspects of the agency of the Neighborhood Council vis-à-vis the public administration and two of its service agencies.

Finally, when reviewing the questionnaires answered by the workshop participants, the general satisfaction expressed by participants establishes adequate progress toward the workshop's

objectives. It favors accepting the methods and receiving the contents provided. Here are the answers provided.

Answers from participants to the questionnaire handed out at the end of session four:

¿How did you feel today in class?

1. Good
2. Very good
3. Today, the most interesting topics in this project
4. Very good
5. Excellent for the part about noise pollution and public spaces
6. Very good because we are all involved
7. Very good, thank God
8. Very good
9. Good
10. Very good. Lots of interaction
11. Very good
12. Very good

¿What did you learn most from today's class?

1. Changing methods that don't work
2. That the influence of the majority will always go hand in hand with knowledge to solve problems
3. A little bit of everything
4. The presentation that was made
5. Consensus, measurement, neighborhood meeting
6. That music is a form of expression for young people who need to be heard and that when something doesn't work, a change of strategy must be made
7. The importance that the neighborhood meeting should have in the community
8. The work done today
9. The country lacks organization, and "until something is named, it doesn't exist."
10. How to deal with noise pollution through education
11. “Until something is named, it does not exist.”
12. Ways to deal with situations that arise in the community

¿What did you like most about today's class?

1. The lecturer's method.
2. The interaction that occurred with the topics.
3. The topic of human unions.
4. All the topics that were discussed.
5. So far so Good.
6. We should organize ourselves as a community.
7. The moderator's handling, diction, and desire to improve the conditions of the community.
8. Participation.
9. It was very participatory.
10. How to deal with noise pollution.
11. We should include those who cause the problem as part of the solution.
12. The teacher's straightforward way of transmitting ideas.

¿Is there anything you felt uncomfortable with in today's class?

1. No
2. Nothing
3. No, everything was good
4. Nothing at all
5. So far, so good
6. No, everything was perfect
7. Nothing
8. Nothing
9. No
10. Nothing
11. Nothing
12. Nothing

¿Do you have any recommendations or comments on improving something in the class?

1. N/A
2. Everything is fine
3. The topic is good
4. Address some aspects of the call
5. So far, everything is fine
6. Everything is fine. The instructor is very clear and expresses himself very well.
7. So far, everything is going well
8. Punctuality
9. No
10. Keep trying with the signage in the sector
11. Everything was excellent
12. Nothing

Chapter 9: Workshop 5: The reconstruction of planning. A mission for the future

A fifth workshop was convened to facilitate a constructivist conversation between the participants and public agencies about the possibilities of working together in the future. The second part was reserved for a general experience assessment among participants and a final statement by PI. Thus, it could generate a reflective process of interest to all and, simultaneously, reiterate the central ideas that the experience sought, especially the functioning of a local democracy from pedagogical leadership that is sensitive and understanding of others and their circumstances.

I saw two exercises that needed to be incorporated throughout the past sessions' development to strengthen the project's conclusion and prepare for its future. So, I discussed this with the participants, and an additional session was conducted. Due to the time it took us to present and discuss the community issues in sessions three and four, extending the workshop with one more work session was necessary and prudent.

The fifth session's objective was to meet with two state agencies with which the Neighborhood Council could establish a future line of work. The project's sustainability implied that the organization could plan an action rather than respond to a contingency as has been the tradition. In fact, both in the preparatory interviews for the project and during the conversations inside and outside the workshops throughout the four preceding sessions, all the actions that were talked about as having been taken in the past were essentially actions in response to specific problems that had to be resolved immediately: issues with rates and supply of electric power service, for example; or the case of garbage collection by the city council; or the case of access to drinking water and sewage treatment services in the eastern area of the sector.

Each of these measures responded to an urgent need and, in some cases, an emergency, such as the case of the deceased lady already mentioned and other cases of death in the community that required special intervention due to the poverty of its inhabitants to carry out the removal of the bodies and the corresponding funeral services. I repeat that this management before the public authorities was always done in response to a pressing situation. Historically, the Neighborhood Council, as I highlighted in the first chapter, has remained in the Dominican popular imaginary as a mechanism to exert pressure in extreme contingency situations, requesting essential elements of survival: requesting road communication, asking for a nearby school to be built, stopping expulsion of inhabitants from the land, or even exerting pressure before the media to protect a fugitive search by the police to preserve his life.

In all cases, an urgent need caused the community to unite, and the Neighborhood Council is the figure of legitimacy that the communities use to converse with society and demand actions from the public authorities in favor of their interests. However, these elements usually occur only in extreme situations or cases that cannot wait or require an instant protective solution.

The same is true of the functioning of the Neighborhood Council of El Progreso: none of the interventions communicated by the most veteran members of the Neighborhood Council mentioned planned activities in which the governing body and the community sat down to consider their problems in the medium and long term and establish contacts with the competent authorities to improve some aspect of community life in the sector beyond contingency.

For this project, this information was essential for me to complete the design of an organized social action that would think and carry out its interventions with the necessary preparation and time for a democratic process, efficient in its services, adequate in its community sense, and pedagogical for the community. In effect, one evidence of the resignation that reigns in

the neighborhood is conformity with a minimum with which survival is sought, often at the cost of maintaining extreme situations within precariousness. Any effort to get out of something, even if its precariousness, is seen as natural, as one of the participants pointed out during the pre-assessment interviews when she said, "Now we are fine because we have water 4 days a week," instead of seven days a week.

In such survival mode, the social and community dimension of the struggle for existence is mixed with the personal dimension. Both are highly demanding on the bodies and minds of the subjects, who must optimize their scarce resources, often due to the physical and mental powerlessness to devote time to imagination, much less to planning (Cela, 2020). A personal and collective life lived from a planning perspective would mean having the time and self-confidence in the future to imagine and decide about one's own life based on a principle of reasonableness instead of just reacting to the arbitrary contingencies of life, as often happens in conditions of poverty. With reactive and non-prospective responses, solutions usually need to be more superficial or sufficient to overwhelm structural crises. The anthropology of planning in contexts of poverty must necessarily consider these special conditions of impoverished subjects.

Before imposing traditional schemes of future action, such as planning, how can planning be reconstructed as a social action nourished by a socially sustained affordability in social conditions like poverty that usually deny subjects a sense of genuine future realizations?

To put it more concretely, the lessons learned in the third and fourth sessions are that in contexts of poverty, people tend to seek to correct the most pressing situations that touch their lives at their most sensitive points. However, to encourage people to think (or even feel) about the possibilities of improvement or innovation around them, one has to reconstruct the possibility of dreaming of better, real-life situations.

In my meditations around the third and the fourth workshops, where I had to intervene several times to invite participants to go beyond the traditional framework of sight, I reflected on how hope and imagination are two elements that are usually linked. Where hope, as a social projection, is generally affected, the possibility of imagining, as a psychic phenomenon, is also usually affected. When I talk about imagination, it is the possibility of thinking that things can change; it is the ability not to be satisfied by the present. To imagine change is to have the power to challenge reality and the capacity to reconstruct it, imagine how life could change, and, above all, feel how life would be better with what is imagined. Stendhal (2022) called this the "promise of happiness," a founding expression or image of modernity.

The visit of a team from the Government Office for Information and Communications Technology (OGTIC) and another from the Emergency Operations Center (COE) was coordinated, both vital public service agencies in the Dominican Republic. The first deals with the entire digital transformation policies of the State and its online services to the population. The second concerns the civil and military coordination unit of service to populations in catastrophes (atmospheric phenomena such as cyclones, storms, floods, earthquakes, landslides, fires, etc.). The objective was for both institutions to present their services and for the community, represented by the participants, associated as a Neighborhood Council for the occasion, to respond from their needs and aspirations. The objective was to go beyond the responses to contingencies and plan a new future.

This reconstruction of the aspiration for a different and better community, more organized, was precisely what we addressed in the third and fourth sessions: training ourselves to get out of resignation and history, sometimes ignored, from the exercise of imagined empowerment as a

prelude to the empowerment of attitude. Saying “it can be done” was fundamental. Now, with these public bodies with power for decisions and resources to bring them as facts, the objective was to be closer to change and to sow more confidence in its possibility.

The second objective of this fifth workshop was to meet with the participants after they visited the state institutions for a closing reflective exercise on the subject, in which I would express the conclusions in general ideas.

Rebuilding democratic rationality: El Progress reloaded by OGTIC and COE

In the meeting between SIUBEN and the community, we had already seen how the bureaucratic knowledge of the State had shortcomings and how the community knowledge, accompanied by academic knowledge, allowed us to correct the state one, turning the tripartite conversation into a fruitful association for verifying social reality. Many concepts sought to put their feet on the ground with the realities of the sector and its inhabitants. We saw how indicators did not show what a reality lived as an experience by its inhabitants contributed to the understanding of a reality full of problems. Said in a formula: the democratic rectification (enriched with science and knowledge of the people) of bureaucratic knowledge converted the new knowledge into the reason for democratic action.

It was necessary to organize that into an order of priorities and rehearse it. So, I chose two strategic agencies because they responded to the fields of action required to improve the neighborhood's physical conditions. Both could also fulfill, from different missions, the objective of making the community organization effort sustainable, especially the mission and institutional functioning of the Neighborhood Council. Below are the details of the agencies' participation and

how each contributed to the collective learning process to build a democratic rationality of community action.

OGTIC

The presentation of the OGTIC was the first of the two presentations to take place. Due to the nature of the topic they would deal with, it would be the one that would respond more to bureaucratic processes from which the community of El Progreso as a whole and its inhabitants could benefit in particular situations. The OGTIC sent three officers, including the national deputy director and the person in charge of community services. The OGTIC based its presentation around the so-called GOB Points, a national policy of gathering services from different state agencies in the same physical space to take advantage of information technology. The GOB points have so far been installed in shopping malls and places of remarkable confluence, and their services specifically are the procurement and delivery of official documents (civil registry records, papers from the justice system, the tax system, the educational system, social security, matters from the Ministry of Labor, among others).

The presentation begins with a general introduction to the mission and tasks to which the OGTIC is dedicated as a head of electronic government. OGTIC officials explain how their services offer an advantage to citizens, avoiding traveling long distances and to different places to obtain documents. Frequently, receiving an official paper may involve traveling to institutions with complex processes that include returning several times to the same place and being used by the Dominican State "as messengers" to take an expression from the presentation with which one of the exhibitors indicated how for the same document the State made the citizen go through several instances. From then on, with the use of ICTs, all these processes were simplified in their steps,

and the procurement no longer involved the long queues that citizens had to wait in, which could take up an entire day for the procurators. The officials explained that everything could be done in one place and a much more expeditious manner.

The speaker gave the example of a community, Mata Hambre, very similar sociologically (and geographically close) to El Progreso, which benefited from the services of a Punto Gob by the OGTIC. The presentation of the OGTIC generated great expectations among those present, especially given the possibility of installing a state agency on the community premises. Many expressed that this would be an achievement for the Neighborhood Council and the project we were in[43].

The participants asked questions about specific elements of the types of services offered and, on each occasion, specified how this would impact the community. One of the participants told me that the presentation "is like a gift to the community," which, as he explained, would impact both the services themselves and the "sense of community."

The participants felt very flattered by the visit and the presentation. Among the participants were the church directors who were present for this fifth closing session when they saw what was happening. There was a moment of ecstasy among all those present. Also present were the members of the COE, who, in a few minutes, would have their turn to speak. Everyone was participating in an exceptional event: an empowered Neighborhood Council, which felt like a host and simultaneously protagonists of a moment that made them the center of the night. For the first time, one of the church members told me, the locals felt they were the object of special attention

[43] During the communications I held with the OGTIC to arrange the visit to the workshop, the OGTIC showed interest in installing a PUNTO GOB in the community. I immediately contacted members of the Neighborhood Board, and together with the OGTIC, we visited an office space that was currently unoccupied and available for rent. I proposed establishing a point from which the government would have a presence within the community, the inhabitants would have a place where they could obtain documents just a few steps from their homes, and the Neighborhood Council could have a point of support for its actions.

from the authorities. “Not one, but two institutions are here, and which institutions!” said another of the participants.

The introductions I made for both presentations made the visitors almost euphoric. They felt contrary to other places they were accustomed to visiting where the welcome is usually rather cold, with indifference or as simple consumers of an experience. The story was different in El Progreso. The welcome and the messages that were expressed about the presence of everyone there, where I emphasized how these institutions were at the service of the people and how the people are the ones that make democracy possible, turned that moment into a republican rite where everyone participated into a direct democracy experience, in what we had perhaps heard so much about in abstract terms.

COE

When it was the turn of the COE to participate, the excitement of those present increased. The COE is seen by many as a military unit. A general of the Dominican army leads the institution. In his interventions, especially during the rainy season or hurricanes, his presence in the media captures national attention. The representatives of the COE arrived in military uniforms and symbols. And they immediately assumed the public service speech with which they had been received and introduced by me. And if it was a moment of great emotion for the participants, it was also for the COE officers, who felt they were fulfilling their duty recognized by the host community.

It should be noted that the COE officers came to the workshop instructed by their superiors because they had been informed and requested to participate so they could attend to us with due attention and speed. This is very important within the reflective exercise because there is a tradition

in the Dominican Republic where State institutions come to a neighborhood to talk and plan things by themselves. They tend to intervene as if they were the local Neighborhood Council in response to specific situations that require urgent attention.

These historical situations (going to a community to resolve things without a properly structured counterpart and recognized as such as a representative of the intervened sector) tend to configure asymmetrical meetings between one party, that is, the provider and the other party that is the recipient of the population subject to authority or authoritarianism, one of the most characteristic features of Dominican political culture. And that situation was precisely what was different here: a community with a structured work program is visited by a public agency to discuss future work, which produced a conversation of mutual interest, where both parties were on equal terms, and where the staging of the meeting provided the community with the institutional capital necessary to earn the recognition of the state institution. These conditions enabled respect and empathy from one party to the other and vice versa, and not unilaterally.

The initial speech with which I introduced the session (where I insisted on how the community can organize itself and how these State agencies can contribute, in close collaboration, to organize El Progreso better) let them see that it was an exercise in civic and citizenship (relatively new for them), which sought to strengthen the ties between the communities and their institutions. Hence, both parties felt that they were playing a prestigious role in a perfect division of democratic labor, where the participants assumed themselves as the sovereign power (from which democratic legitimacy emanates) and the authorities as the established power (legally and materially empowered and responsible for the execution of policies for the people and of the people).

Here, democracy, from a community perspective, assumed a fruitful dialogue between the power of the people (usually diffuse and somewhat abstract) and the visible power (the State in its forces of intervention, but not to repress, but precisely for its opposite: to protect); between the legitimacy of the local, and the real power of the national (in a country like the Dominican Republic where there is very little power in the mayors' offices to act on their cities or towns). But, in addition, and this is extremely important, there was a strategic and fruitful dialogue due to the discussed planning of the future and its possibilities.

In sum, civilians saw the military in roles of care, and the military saw civilians exercising an active political role of representation of their own, without the intervention of a partisan policy but a vicinity policy, purged of interests foreign to the concrete reality of the neighborhood. Of course, my presence as an academic was key from several perspectives: as an entity of legitimacy and trust, as a means of communication, and as a witness for both parties.

Under these conditions, camaraderie and excitement grew among everyone as the COE explained its functions and gradually conversed with the participants, who interacted with them about the different situations they observed upon their arrival regarding managing all types of risks that the community had. Without a doubt, the issue of overpopulation and the very special topology of El Progreso was a crucial issue that they pointed out immediately. They addressed it in a very professional manner, which impacted us all.

The COE addressed each of the problems from the perspective of the difficulties that would occur in the event of an event and how the security and rescue agencies would need help in attending to the community. For example, they talked about the possible floods, fires, or earthquakes and how unprotected the sector's population could be, mainly due to the lack of

preparation of the community to be rescued. The situation put us all on general alert, and we felt that the very next day, the problem had to begin to be seriously considered.

In particular, we were shocked when, after discussing possible earthquakes and their consequences, the participants themselves evoked the subject of constructions in the sector that were being carried out without permits and basic engineering principles, which posed dangers in several of the recently built apartment buildings in the area. This presence was a kind of return to this welfare State, which resumed its role of protection, accompaniment, and care of the most vulnerable populations in partnership with the community without a paternalistic role.

The COE discussed the problems and the measures that could be taken to prevent or help the community during a calamity. On each occasion, the participants reacted based on their experiences of community life, which added precision because most of the things presented by the visitors were endorsed and verified in numbers by the locals. These added real emotion to the conversation. As these were preventive elements, we mainly approached the problem from a planning perspective.

The COE explained how they work in such cases: They prepare a risk report for the sector and then talk with local leaders to implement the appropriate preventive measures, along with other agencies.

It was a great moment; we all left both presentations informed and motivated. After the COE's participation, the visitors left. We, the project participants, and the leadership of the church that hosted us remained to address the closing topic of the workshops: educational leadership.

Learning, understanding, and accompanying. Educational leadership and vicinity.

When I conceived and prepared the fifth session during the fieldwork (especially after sessions three and four), I designed a second and final part of it, which would serve as a final reflection and, at the same time, be a kind of synthesis of everything worked on over the five weeks that the participants and I shared.

In this sense, I wanted to concentrate on democratic leadership and neighborhood policy as a summary of the discussion and as a final message. They were the best synthesis of everything seen and the final emphasis, a prompter of the principles that should govern democratically organized social action.

What did we do throughout these workshops? I asked the group as an element of provocation. A little disoriented by the unexpected question, I talked to them about social reality and the best action to improve it. I had to find a figure that would serve as an example, and the participants would quickly assimilate that figure that could directly relate to their history and the subject. That was the figure of the educator: the educator who communicates, who also knows his students, leads a process with a specific population and with particular objectives, and has methods to reach them. To do this, it was necessary to clarify the multiple facets of this educator, in this case, converted into an educator no longer of a classroom but of a community, and more than an educator per se, a vicinity leader of a cause: social action for democratic change, organized by a Neighborhood Council.

The educator as a sociologist

Any project for social change should only be undertaken with first understanding of what needs to be changed. Understanding a reality like the one in El Progreso for its residents is studying it from one's own experience and other research resources, which can confirm the initial hypothesis

we may have about a particular problem or situation. The process of inquiring about a social phenomenon implies, as we did here, first knowing the empirical reality in which we live; the more details, the better, in light of what the community should be in terms of the conditions of a dignified life and universal democratic coexistence to which everyone in a community has the right. It is, therefore, necessary to know the concepts of dignity, social justice, and democracy, among others of those observed, to then be able to understand and compare them to the reality that is lived so that, from a distance between one and the other, we can detect the problems in terms of causes and effects. That is the diagnostic element.

In our case, I reminded the participants the first thing we did was to address the elements (the words!) of a community: what it is, how it works, what human dignity is, and how its respect or disrespect is manifested; what social justice is -and its opposite; what democracy is, how it works, etc. All these, with concrete examples of other realities, to have that picture in mind; we were able to address in the second session the fact with the greatest possible exhaustiveness that the numbers can provide. However, the statistical reality is not the objective reality, so in that second session, we compared the findings of the SIUBEN census to the experiential knowledge of the community members and the sociological knowledge I contributed. This led to the reconstruction of each party's partial understanding, whose mutual verification was specified and extracted in a dynamic and democratic exercise, where the people as protagonists, the State responsible for social order, and science interacted on the knowledge of the common good. Then, we saw how the reflective exercise, that is, looking at our surroundings and looking at ourselves, and vice versa, gave us a verified diagnosis not only of the most pressing problems of the community (some of which arose or were aired in public for the first time) but also of the actors involved in that reality, starting with the workshop participants themselves.

The educator as a social worker

"Once the diagnosis of reality's causes, dynamics, and effects has been established, what to do? It is not only what happens, but what we do with what we find as reality," I shared with those present, who remained attentive and occasionally nodded their heads or made brief interventions.

In the case of realities in contexts of poverty, every social fact can be explained by the history that precedes it. Knowing where a problem or attitude comes from usually succeeds in educating the knowledge of it and one's attitude. Hence, understanding a situation usually frees us from confusion and stress in the face of what is not what we expect. And that, for a neighborhood policy, is fundamental, I told the participants. The first neighborhood policy could be the attitude of friendship towards those who live near us. It is essential to generate a harmonious coexistence process, where despite all the conditions, we, the members of the Neighbourhood Council, are not the ones who contribute to the problem but to the solution. Leadership, I explained to the participants, is knowing how to act differently than usual; it is learning how to go against the current, thinking on understanding first what happens with others.

That understanding may convert our knowledge into an attitude of compassion, which is nothing more than putting ourselves in the shoes of the other, as we had already expressed. Sociological knowledge begins to be transformed into clinical knowledge. An educator would try to generate a process where the original symptomatology would be transformed into treatment, that is, into an optimal process conceived to care for or lead to a state of well-being of someone else, in this case, that of a community and its inhabitants. The educator as a social worker starts from the diagnosis and proposes to accompany, that is, thinks and morally motivates the action of

challenging reality from an ethical perspective: what do I do in the face of reality to seek the common good?

The educator as a democratic community leader

The neighborhood policy, informed by a sociological pragmatism, would imply the constitution of a sense of responsibility of those neighborhood residents with communal capital that their neighbors lack or have to a lesser extent (educational level or social awareness, life experience, monetary resources, time, etc.). I expressed to those present in the session that these assets are usually found among the present participants of the workshop, who have been able to dedicate time and attitude of interest to community affairs, a situation different from the majority in a sector like El Progreso. Hence, as in any social or political process, the movements that come out of inertia are motivated by community leadership. We are all potential leaders! I stated.

The big question is whether this leadership is democratic or authoritarian: when it is done for the common good and not for personal desires; when it is done through participatory processes and negotiations and not impositions; when it is done taking care of everyone and not mistreating anyone. What defines the type of one or the other leadership is a way of managing the power of information and knowledge before those who do not have it. Hence, community leadership has to involve its neighbors, without any inclusion, as an indispensable condition of an authentic local democracy.

But this informed leadership (by sociology) and sensitivity (acting with compassion) to action (guide through social work) needs to conceive an action with the principle of equity in mind, which is the principle of justice before injustices, especially when there are so many who suffer it in a time and place like El Progreso today. Here, I return to the definition that we shared on equity:

to each according to his needs, which would suggest that in any exercise of planning social action, we would have to define beneficiaries and time according to the degree of affectation or vulnerability that one population has over another. It is an ethical guide seeking the common good in any neighborhood policy that the Neighborhood Council would seek to consider and implement. The time is running out to the end, and I have left two more brief points to address.

The educator as a communicator

Once this action plan has been conceived, it is necessary to know how to communicate its objective, processes, and justifications. Involve the neighbors in the policy and be flexible to any amendment to the original project according to the possibilities of implementation and the communities' attitude towards them, which could be varied. Here, ladies and gentlemen, language plays a social action role. Without knowing how to build a communicative policy as a key strategy for neighborhood policy, the best of plans could have any adverse reaction from populations that usually carry within themselves years of disappointment, that suffer harsh living conditions, and that have been accustomed to paternalistic welfare policies where in the best of cases they only participate as passive actors or recipients.

There is the legitimate objective of bringing the good news. Still, it should always be informed and communicated with the rest of the neighbors, seeking transparency and respect for consensus, which is respect both for the majority and minorities, including dissenting voices. As we saw in session four, communication is both a means and an end. For the latter, we require a community of partners who get involved and participate harmoniously, from the richness of their diverse experiences, in the collective reconstruction of the present and the community preparation for the future. But it is also a means to reach the construction of that community. Hence, every

policy must have the means to prepare its communicative actions and carry them out as an integral part of the accompaniment of community social action.

The educator as educator

Finally, dear friends, every neighborhood policy should be sustainable over time and self-managed by the community, which is the only legitimate protagonist of its history. From that communicative action mentioned above, community leadership should emulate the work of an educator in the sense closest to its etymology: to activate and accompany the process so that the community can flourish the latent treasures that rest within.

Everything that happens in the neighborhood is susceptible to becoming a lesson. You have to know how experiences become more or less conscious experiences and how, later, through various mechanisms, they can become community knowledge, not only for a Neighborhood Council but for the community as a whole. Following the steps of adult education and explicitly learning that transforms, every event is potentially a critical incident or disorienting dilemma, which is left to community leaders to create the conditions for a reflective exercise that contributes to the personal and collective improvement of the community members.

The various examples that the workshop provided in its various sessions, including the visits of SIUBEN to report community indicators and that of the OGTIC and the COE, can serve as examples that the Neighborhood Council itself could replicate in subsequent integration exercises. The same is true of the work of highlighting the members of the community and their communal capital, that is, the provision of knowledge that they can put at the service of the neighborhood. In addition, it would serve as an element of inclusion and social dignity by being recognized for their existence and actions.

In short, these ideas serve as a strategic reference for possible future personal and collective actions. The Neighborhood Council guides its actions in an informed, compassionate, participatory, communicated, and sustainable way over time, in a permanent exercise of reflexivity observed to educate and educate itself. I shared with those present that the Neighborhood Council is a collective educator who feels, thinks, and acts for the common good of its fellow neighbors.

Closing remarks

At the end of my intervention, the participants began to intervene to thank me and commit themselves to me and to the church members in the continuity of what they had learned. There was a lot of camaraderie and necessary fraternity. There was tiredness, but it also felt that we had all discovered something significant in our lives by sharing an experience that was new for all of us and brought us knowledge that consolidated our work, some as academics, others as public servants, others as social activists, most simply as citizens. That dimension that American pragmatism has called moral perfectionism in personal terms, this project idea was to transform it operationally into a community exercise.

From the first session exercise with the visit of the two agencies, we noticed that the consolidation of hope necessarily involves feeding the knowledge of what is possible. It is necessary to do so with sufficient communication and the sessions organized through stages. Reading the participants' responses (below) about the dynamics of the class confirms once again that, in general, there was a learning process among the participants in which hope, motivation, and faith in change were incorporated into the collective consciousness of the group. The right to dream was what I was looking for. With its specific elements, this fifth session contributed to the

ability to structure an imagination based on concrete ideas that are possible and viable for a decent and supportive community.

Answers from participants to the questionnaire handed out at the end of session five:

¿How did you feel in class today?

1. Good, super Good.
2. Very Good.
3. Very Good.
4. Very interesting and important.
5. The proposal and project with the State institutions. Very good.
6. Excellent
7. Very Good.
8. Excellently good.
9. Very Good.
10. Excellent.
11. Very Good.
12. Very Good.
13. Very Good and fruitful.
14. Very Good.

¿What did you learn most from today's class?

1. That it is possible that in my country, there are institutions that can help citizens to solve common problems in our community.
2. The visit of the institutions that accompanied us tonight.
3. How today's class was explained.
4. The participation of the COE and the information from the OGTIC.
5. Everything is fine.
6. That when there is unity, everything is achieved.
7. The integration of each of the participants.
8. The functions of the OGTIC and its locations.
9. That people from the current government came to listen to us and to be able to find a solution to the problems of the community.
10. The possibility of improving the quality of life and services of the community.
11. About emergency processes.
12. I learned that the community needs rapid planning.
13. The presentations and their explanation of the advice of the OGITC and the COE.

15. The presentations of the COE, OGTIC, their functions, and how they can collaborate with us in the community.

¿What did you like most about today's class?

1. The emergency operations center (COE) can learn what to do in times of disaster and identify the risk in our home in my community.
2. The learning we have had.
3. What the COE explained.
4. The proposals of the government institutions.
5. Everything that was projected is good.
6. The institutions of the OGTIC are exciting.
7. The intervention of the COE, its willingness to work with the community.
8. The visit of the representatives of the OGITC and the COE (Explanations).
9. I learned that the purpose of the COE is preparation, response, and recovery.
10. The institutions of the COE and the OGTIC.
11. Everything. It was a very dynamic meeting.
12. The visit that came today.
13. The guidelines of the COE that just invited us to participate in teachings.
14. The proposal of the COE.

¿Is there anything that you felt uncomfortable with in today's class?

1. No, everything was fine.
2. Speed up the subsequent visits.
3. Nothing.
4. Everything was fine.
5. Nothing.
6. No.
7. Nothing.
8. Nothing.
9. No, everything was fine.
10. Nothing.
11. Nothing.
12. None.
13. Nothing.
14. Nothing.

¿Do you have any recommendations or comments on improving something in the class?

1. Always remember to be punctual. Thank you very much for your time and support. Blessings.
2. Everything is fine for now.
3. Punctuality.
4. N/A.
5. Everything is fine. The author's proposals.
6. No.
7. Nothing.
8. Nothing.
9. Take notes of what was said (I imagine it was recorded).
10. Make the next steps for the relations with the invited institutions more defined.
11. N/A.
12. Call all the participants.
13. Bring back the teachings of the invited institutions.
14. Everything is excellent.

Chapter 10: Post-assessment interviews analysis

At the end of the workshop series, enthusiasm was evident from the very evening of the fifth and last session. I received several calls from participants, some thanking me, others asking me when we would see each other again, especially to follow up on the visits and general agreements made with the two State agencies that accompanied us on the last day.

Since the last time we saw each other, I let a few days pass before calling each participant again to coordinate the round of final interviews. Of the twelve initial interviews, only a few participants dropped out. Attendance varied depending on whether or not church members interested in accompanying us were present, and a couple of times, two young people showed up to obtain benefits, but they left and never returned.

This time, I could have conducted nine interviews out of the 12 that could have been performed. The other three people who did not give interviews had family or work situations that prevented us from finding time in their schedules to do so. I tried several times, but I was unsuccessful. The three people excused themselves. The rest, the nine who responded, did so with great enthusiasm.

Because some of the people interviewed in this last round were not present in the first round, I preferred to take general and comparative elements where the idea is to obtain a summary view, first of how they remembered the experience, going into the details of what they liked the most, what new thing they learned, what their recommendations would be for the future, and finally the interviewees answered a brief questionnaire with the same questions about the concepts of Community, Local Democracy, Dignity, Social Justice. It must be said that it is difficult to trust a comparative version of the interviews, not only because some attended and others did not, but also

because of the variety of linguistic capital that each has so that many times everything learned or known does not necessarily have the expression that could express it. Some of the interviewees, within their dignity, made gestures as if they wanted to extract the words, full of intention, but could not specify them. However, they recognized key phrases, as we will see now.

I decided then to present here the ten most common elements that the nine interviewees talked about regarding their experience in the workshop and the aspects that they took away from it.

The comprehensive vision

When asked about what they learned most during the workshop, most interviewees referred to how it changed their perspective on youth concerning the loud music they play and when they play basketball on the court. The interviewees stated, “You must put yourself in their shoes.” I wanted to understand “where these boys come from or what they are going through.” Some interviewees noted that, moving forward, they would engage with them and try to persuade them instead of simply judging or confronting them. This was one of the sensitive points of the workshop, where participants were perhaps more hesitant to accept a different viewpoint than their own. When I observed their reactions to my comments during the other sessions, I sensed it could lead to intense controversy at some point. However, the workshop participants listened attentively each time I spoke, and we exchanged ideas on the topic. The women, in particular, listened and supported many of the aspects that gradually became common sense. Behind this lies the shift from a mindset of judgment and an obsession with individual responsibility that we are raised with in an authoritarian culture. Now, the perspective of those interviewed is more connected to a context in which they understand that young people's behaviors are not capricious; rather, their

actions often arise as a response to social issues stemming from the socioeconomic conditions in which they live, where, despite their young age, hope is already vulnerable.

The presence of state agencies

Almost all interviewees highlighted the presence of the COE and the OGTIC as one of the most critical aspects of the workshops. Some stated that during these meetings, they realized the numerous opportunities available in their community. Others mentioned that they began to envision many of the topics discussed, especially considering the potential for these services or interventions in their neighborhood. Additionally, some noted that the subject of the COE made them aware of the vulnerabilities faced by many, such as the risks associated with a fire or an earthquake. Undoubtedly, these meetings served a threefold purpose: first, they empowered participants to become hosts and protagonists in an official meeting with institutions they typically do not have access to, allowing for calm discussions, negotiations, and even planning; secondly, they enabled the identification of specific actions that could be implemented, which would provide the Neighborhood Council with actionable elements to work with. Finally, these gatherings fostered the exploration of possibilities that began in session three, matured in session four, and culminated in session five.

Communicative action

In some cases, after the program, the participants responded that they would always communicate with the neighborhood if they had to be president or lead the Neighborhood Council. To my surprise, the issue of sensitivity to communication with neighbors resonated with the participants as one of the most interesting learnings from the program.

Knowing the community in its details

Another of the essential elements that the interviewees had in mind in their responses was how they now know about their community with numbers and details. One even said, "Now I can confidently talk to you about the community." Without a doubt, the numbers bring to the imagination a map with references that structures and strengthens the possibility of making neighborhood policies and having more strength when talking with agencies or entities outside the community. For planning purposes, it is a fundamental tool now in the hands of the Neighborhood Council for the benefit of the community. Now, it remains to be seen whether SIUBEN and other state agencies can join forces to replicate the exercise in different neighborhoods and thus be able to build from the information below on which the state's social policies in the sector depend.

Strengthening civic commitment

This is one of the key points of the thesis. All those interviewed responded that they decided to assume a more significant commitment based on their experience with community affairs. Of course, for this to happen, it is necessary to meet a series of conditions, even material ones, that the Residents' Board does not have right now, such as a place where they can meet and some other elements that make it practically difficult to form a Residents' Board as we imagined in the workshop. In any case, the civic attitude is there, and it is understanding and compassionate.

Solidarity with neighbors

One of the characteristics expressed by the interviewees was the feeling that each of their neighbor's lives now takes on a different dimension after the workshop. As if the one who was always there now, when one runs into him or walks past his house, expressed some of the

participants, understands that what is important is the exchange between people. This communication occurs in everyday life, which makes a community. This is an essential element because it touches on several dimensions that we wanted to positively affect, such as the fraternal vision in the community from a sensitivity that generates it, from that educational or compassionate leadership that we talked about several times in the sessions, especially in the last one, where we dedicated the final reflection to the relationship between leadership and the role of the responsible, creative and communicative educator.

Hope brought by the workshop

Hope is very similar to civic commitment, but here, hope involves elements of greater magnitude. As some interviewees expressed, hope concerns better commitment and better days for the community and the interviewees' personal lives.

Compassionate vision

Among the examples from which the interviewees started to ponder their experiences in the workshop, the word aging appeared to talk about the care that must be given to older people in the community. One, during the presentation about diabetes, said that older people are an issue that the Neighborhood Council must take on and prioritize for future actions that it may have.

How people treat each other with respect

An unexpected point for me, and which came to mind in several of the participants, was the one that had to do with the appreciation they had about how their participating neighbors behaved throughout the sessions, where respect always prevailed within the discussions, and a

common will to get the best out of themselves to build those conclusions that resulted in each one of the workshops. Indeed, the camaraderie that was experienced was a delightful surprise. I think it had to do with the fact that the intensity of the program offered kept the interest and attention occupied all the time by what was being said, which allowed the reality of the workshop to be stronger than any other communal or personal reality that could endanger the peace and fluidity of the work sessions.

The way of explaining

I leave this element for last because of the personal nature of it. Still, the dialogic teaching method was well received, from the explanation and the examples, the participation, and the dynamic of the variety with which the workshops were designed, where I consistently reiterated concepts and ideas but never repeated the same thing.

Keywords

I only sometimes found the answers with the best definitions when I asked the interviewees about the concepts we had worked on in the sessions. However, at least one word was found with which the interviewees identified the definitions. It must be said that the answers far exceeded in terms of definition what I had received during the first round of interviews at the beginning of the project. Here are the definitions and the most recurrent words expressed by the interviewees:

1. “Democracy is participation.”
2. “Dignity: an intrinsic quality that we all carry.”
3. “Social justice: to each according to his needs.”
4. “Community is exchanged.”

Conclusions

By the end of this research's social and academic experience, several conclusions can be drawn from the entire process. Here are the primary ones:

- (1) It confirmed that individuals living in historical poverty and social marginalization often convert their vulnerabilities into precarious civic engagement;
- (2) when participants were invited to transform their experiences into an inquiry process that assigns names, concepts, numbers, and voices to their realities, awareness and motivation grew in their attitudes toward the potential for social action;
- (3) through organized discussions about community issues, participants gained the ability to envision new realities and innovative methods for achieving their goals;
- (4) when the program facilitated conversations among state agencies, participants, and the PI’s sociological perspective on the community's status, the official narrative was enriched, promoting a better understanding of public agencies on the community reality, a more comprehensive approach to people to their reality was reached, and social science could validate its findings;
- (5) by positioning participants as the program's protagonists, grounded in their legitimacy as residents and their experiential knowledge shaped for the occasion through various adult education strategies, individual and collective dignity was recognized and promoted.

If there was a need to summarize the core theme/findings of this empirical study, the following general ideas could be mentioned and ordered:

1. The quest for social change starts from the common participants' motivation and faith in social hope and the possibility of better days.
2. Social learning (from people's experiences and social sciences knowledge) reconstructs social knowledge, which is at the base of any effort to raise awareness of the possibility of change.
3. Imagination plays a critical role in impeaching reality and rehearsing a new one.
4. Both as a speech act and an existential symbol, voice is crucial to stimulating and sustaining people's hope.
5. A democratic leadership must first be informed to be comprehensive of people's reality.
6. Using democratic principles and educational perspectives has helped forge ideas among participants about compassionate leadership that equitably understands and cares for others.
7. Congregation was a key aspect of providing confidence and hope to each of the individuals.

Core theme/findings (How do key components support group learning?)

1. Following Lewin's field theory, the adult learning program was designed as a social field in which the group's performance progresses through learning from the mutual and dynamic adjustment between the offer and the participants' development of their communal capital (the unique contributions each participant makes that may benefit the group and program).

2. Collecting dispersed biographical and social information and making a coherent prosopography of the neighborhood impacted the group, allowing me to gain their confidence and make knowledge enjoyable.

3. SIUBEN's census raised community awareness and increased participants' interest in the program.

4. Participants' presentations and discussions elevated the conversation, fostering imagination and transforming reality into a living entity that could be altered. Pessimism evolved into hope as future and future-fueled planning.

5. State agencies' visits and conversations elevate collective and personal dignity.

6. A structured and organized gathering brought back trust among the participants and as a group.

Sociology, Pragmatism, and Adult Education.

At the beginning of this project, a belief in the synergy of three academic traditions coexisted in a kind of social division of the researcher's labor.

1. Reconstruction of social trust: The Participants' attendance was perfect and enthusiastic (12 initial participants completed the five workshops). Their behavior toward each other was always respectful despite a history of differences and even some past disputes. An union and a common faith were reached.
2. Reconstruction of voice: As the workshops progressed, one after another, the group's participation and interactions became increasingly dynamic and active. Interventions

emerged continuously while refining their quality (interventions growth in workshops 3, 4, and 5).

3. Reconstructing an informed democratic truth: The participants' collective inquiry established a clear and detailed view of community realities. Rigorous data discussions utilized quantitative (statistical) information, qualitative insights (from participants' reflective experiences), and sociological perspectives. Participants highlighted this as one of the most crucial lessons learned in the program: the importance of understanding the community and how to inquire about it for social action. The group finished the program as a collective intellectual entity, knowledgeable about the community and equipped to represent it before public agencies (as shown in workshop 5).
4. Reconstructing Imagination: Possibilism broadens the perspective on problems, solutions, and social action, transitioning from present-based inertia to a planned future filled with new beginnings and innovative ideas, as shown in workshop 4.
5. Reconstructing Leadership: Participants transitioned from authoritarian responses to community issues toward a more comprehensive and compassionate understanding of people within social contexts. The post-assessment interviews also highlighted the importance of communicative actions with the community.

Significance

- (1) Social learning that incorporates adult education strategies with reflexive sociology knowledge, epistemology, and techniques can enhance social inquiry both as a method and as an objective to empower adult learners' awareness and reconstruct a shared understanding and faith.

- (2) This sociologically informed pragmatism may help populations from impoverished contexts develop and structure community social organization and compassionate leadership. These efforts should reinforce neighborhood policy perspectives and advance comprehensive local democratic practices for social change.
- (3) The connection between adult education and sociology offers a valuable opportunity to explore subjects, techniques, concepts, and methods toward a cohesive and pragmatist social science dedicated to the moral development of democracy and social change. Scholars like Dewey, Lindeman, Freire, hooks, Bourdieu, Wright Mills, Cavell, and many others advocate for a stronger integration of knowledge into a citizen's science that focuses on the common good and universal dignity.

As a reflective exercise, the general message of this thesis turns around two concepts developed while the study was conducted:

1. **Sociological pragmatism**: a social action that seeks to impact reality and generate social change. It is informed by sociology. With the idea of sociological pragmatism, I wanted to link three cultural traditions (American, European, and Latin American) and three disciplines of knowledge (pragmatic philosophy as a political principle of praxis, the field of adult education as strategies, and sociology as a means of gathering information), within the same complementary, inseparable exercise that seeks to prolong Freire's social learning towards community organization, transforming pragmatism into an exercise of collective education, and sociology (and its research methods) at the service of reflexivity as social action.

2. **Vicinity politics:** I name it as the exercise of local democracy from a pragmatism anchored in the concrete problems of the neighborhood, informed by sociological inquiry. Neighborhood policy is an effort to relaunch and reconnect people with the production of their stories as protagonists of their days. Their decisions can be made with their neighbors through participation in community affairs. Neighborhood policy aims to be a conversation of local democracy among neighbors and between organized neighbors and public powers to procure the common good.

Implications

With more sociology added to the field of adult education, scholars are invited to increase future conversations and research collaborations between both disciplines. Concepts such as *Habitus*, *Cultural capital*, *Illusio*, *Field theory*, *Social imagination, and Practical sense, as well as* methods such as socio-analysis and auto-analysis, may interest Adult education researchers and be incorporated into their inquiries.

There are now many questions pending to be asked and answered and, above all, to be followed up on: How would a neighborhood policy guided by sociological pragmatism in real-time manifest in the concrete practice of organized social action by a Neighborhood Council? How would the neighbors respond to what the assembly imagined, discussed, and dreamed? What would the State and its official statistics look like if it could go and hear how the truth emerges from below after being verified by the people? Could the locality's politics function without the support of public agencies? Would public agencies be willing to accompany the Neighborhood Council in similar experiences?

Social inquiry encompasses both thought and action. This was one of Freire's ideas (1970) when he spoke of the necessary dialogue between community leaders and the people to foster an authentic understanding and challenge of the necrophiliac dynamic and history typically imposed on the populations Freire discussed. Based on the observed social reality, the goal was to establish a practice of rational social learning that enhances the experiences of individuals who come together to think and reflect on their lives in the community. Through their personal stories, collective narratives, and shared issues, the practice of verifying truth—both facts and priorities—alongside a motivated and informed imagination can envision a future beyond tradition and explore feasible, biophilic alternatives to their fading social existence.

Epilogue

El Progreso neighborhood has three entrances, and at each one, there is a symbol that marks the social reality of the sector. At the northern entrance, there is a mural where the image of a young man from the community who died in unclear circumstances is painted on a wall. Some argue that he died as a result of some illegal business he had in that corner; others say it was a natural death. In any case, the image of the mural, made as street art, is there as a reminder or memory of a community that saw some of its children die at a young age. It is the memory of the hopelessness that these youth live, who have to dedicate themselves to multiple activities to be able to overcome the prisons of misery and social reproduction in which they find themselves since birth.

At the western entrance of El Progreso, there is a grocery store where crowds of young people who come from outside gather on weekends to drink and listen to music at a very high volume, and sometimes, you can hear gunshots and mysterious moods. It was one of the places discussed in one of the workshops. There, the same youth entertain themselves, consuming alcohol and who knows what else to try to alleviate a present that is too heavy because they find themselves caught up in a very rigid process of social reproduction, which leaves very few opportunities to escape the wretchedness in which the vast majority of the neighborhood is born, grows, reproduces and probably dies.

Finally, at the southern entrance to the neighborhood, there is a betting and lottery bank, a symbol of the time when all the doors to rationally building a future have closed, and you put your money and future on luck.

The three points signify a neighborhood's past, present, and future; the common thread is the hopelessness of escaping poverty. Grief, violence, distrust, and stigma converge in a complex vicious cycle.

The last time I visited El Progreso, I went with a video camera to make a short audiovisual film of the neighborhood, its narrow streets, one-meter wide, crowded houses, people, and their struggles. A man in his 30s stared at us and asked us what we were doing. We answered that we were making a video about the community. The man became violent and began to shout at us: Get out of here! What we need here is food! We are tired of politicians and politics! Always politics!

We left the place with a profound reflection on the violence that can accumulate in a place like El Progreso, surrounded by luxury, and inside with many basic needs, and, worse, without much hope for change. When we left, I saw the man turn up the music again to full volume and sit like Godot, waiting for nothing and no one. Communal violence can find an outlet, and experiments in popular education may help transform this social frustration into organized participation for the collective reconstruction of current history and the reconquest of trust in the future.

Historian Kristin Ross, in her book Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune (2016), quoted a phrase in which Marx described the extraordinary laboratory of political invention that was the self-managed government by the humble people of Paris in 1871: “The great social measure of the Commune was its working existence. Its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people”. In other words, Marx refers to the profound political innovation embodied in the Paris Commune, viewing direct democracy not as an abstract or merely formal concept, nor as a static idea devised by elites, but

as a fundamental human experience—substantive and experimental—whose lyricism alone electrifies the lives of ordinary people and enlightens their times as a *poiesis*. I sensed something similar while developing this work with the people of El Progreso. It was like the whisper of a cyclone.

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Appendix A. Interview Questions.

Title of the Research Project:

Impeaching Reality: An action-research study exploring the development of a democratic pedagogy for a community-based learning in a context of poverty in the Dominican Republic

Principal investigator:

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The following assessments will be conducted via verbally recorded interviews.

Pre-Assessment Questionnaire

English

Questionnaire for individual interview (15 days before the first workshop. 20 minutes)

1. Age and gender

2. Educational level

3. Time living in Progreso

4. Occupation

5. Do you think the Progreso community can change for the better one day?

6. Have you been a member of the neighborhood council?

7. Do You participate in community activities? (How much?)

8. What are the main problems of the community of progress?

9. How could these problems be solved? (list at least three possible solutions)

10. What are the people of the El Progreso community like?

11. Have you ever participated in a research project?

12. What motivates you to participate in this study?

Español

Cuestionario para entrevista individual (15 días antes del primer taller. 20 minutos)

1. Edad y género
2. Grado educativo
3. Tiempo viviendo en el Progreso
4. Oficio
5. Piensa usted que la comunidad del Progreso puede cambiar para bien algún día
6. Ha sido miembro de la junta de vecinos
7. Participa usted de las actividades de la comunidad
8. Cuáles identifica usted son los principales problemas de la comunidad del progreso
9. Cómo podrían solucionarse esos problemas (mencione tres posibles soluciones)
10. Cómo son las personas de la comunidad El Progreso
11. ¿Has participado alguna vez en algún proyecto de investigación?
12. ¿Qué le motiva a participar de este estudio?

Workshop Survey

English

Questionnaire for interview at the end of each workshop (at the end of each workshop. 3 minutes.)

1. How did you feel today in class?

2. What did you like the most in class today?

3. What did you learn the most?

4. Is there anything you felt uncomfortable about in class today?

5. Do you have any recommendations to improve something in the class?

Español

Cuestionario para entrevista al final de cada taller (al final de cada taller. 3 minutos)

1. ¿Cómo se ha sentido hoy en la clase?
2. ¿Qué es lo que más le ha gustado de la clase hoy?
3. ¿Qué fue lo que más aprendió?
4. ¿Algo con lo que se haya sentido incómodo en la clase de hoy?
5. ¿Alguna recomendación para mejorar algo en la clase?

Post-Assessment & Focus Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire will be used individually and in the focus group.

English

Questionnaire for individual interview at the end of the action research project (Special session, a week after the last workshop. 30-45 minutes)

1. How do you feel at the end of the experience?

2. What do you get from the experience of having participated in this project?

3. What do you think are the points you liked the most?

4. What do you think are the most pressing community problems?

5. How do you think they can be solved?

6. What were the elements that you think could be improved from an experience like this study?

7. Do You feel that the community can change?

8. How do you think the people of the El Progreso community are?

9. would you participate in the Neighborhood Committee from now on?

10. Do you feel more optimistic or pessimistic about things that can be done in the community?

11. Which elements or qualities do you think you learned helped strengthen you on a personal level?

12. What knowledge and methods did you learn that may strengthen your commitment to the community, and how do you think you can use this moving forward?

Español

Cuestionario para entrevista individual al final del proyecto de investigación acción (Una sesión especial después del último taller. 20 minutos)

1. ¿Cómo te sientes al finalizar la experiencia?
2. ¿Qué sacas de la experiencia de haber participado en este proyecto?
3. ¿Cuáles piensas son los puntos que más te gustaron?
4. ¿Cuáles piensas son los problemas de la comunidad más apremiantes?
5. ¿Cómo piensas se pueden solucionar?
6. ¿Cuáles fueron los elementos que piensan pueden mejorar de una experiencia como la que has vivido en este estudio?
7. ¿Sientes que la comunidad puede cambiar?
8. ¿Cómo piensas que son las personas de la comunidad el Progreso?
9. ¿Participarías de la Junta de Vecino en lo adelante?
10. ¿Te siente más optimista o pesimista acerca de las cosas que se pueden hacer en la comunidad?
11. ¿Cuáles elementos o cualidades crees que aprendiste y fortalecieron tu persona?
12. ¿Cuáles conocimientos y métodos aprendiste que fortalecen tu compromiso con la comunidad y cómo piensas que puedes usarlo en lo adelante?

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form.

A

TRANSLATED DOCUMENT:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (SPANISH TO ENGLISH)

Informed Consent form

Title of the Research Project:

Impeaching Reality: An action-research study exploring the development of a democratic pedagogy for a community-based learning in a context of poverty in the Dominican Republic

Principal investigator:

Juan Miguel Pérez

Professor of Sociology at the School of Economic and Social Sciences,

Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)

Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.

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Tel. 8093501959

Hello!

I invite you to participate in this action-research project entitled “Impeaching reality,” which will take place in the community of El Progreso. The project is designed for members of the community. Participation is entirely voluntary and is free. You do not have to pay anything to participate.

This project seeks to investigate and understand the problems of your community in order to find possible solutions to them. The idea is to think about social change locally by learning sociological knowledge and democratic practices. The project includes four workshops, where classes will be given first on what a community is (how it works) and what the idea of local democracy is (and what its principles are) to organize a community's actions better. A second workshop will be on the meaning of social science, its research methods and techniques, and how it may serve a Neighborhood Council in a communal context of material and social needs. With these new lenses, a third workshop will be given on analyzing the realities of the community of El Progreso itself (from SIUBEN statistics). There will be a final session to design action plans to improve community problems. From the first workshop, the participants will be invited to form small groups of three and belong to one of them to investigate a specific aspect of the social reality of the community (for example, health conditions and care of people, public education, situations of employment and job training, degrees of organization of the Neighborhood Council,

environmental issues, state of social relations and conviviality in the community, among others.). At the end of the project, each group will present a diagnosis and possible solutions to the reality investigated.

A certificate of participation will be delivered at the end of the project.

This research project is part of a doctoral thesis by Professor Juan Miguel Pérez at Columbia University (New York), which seeks to unite social knowledge, democratic practices, and community work, especially from the Neighborhood Councils of communities with needs. The work of this thesis will be carried out in coordination with the Neighborhood Council of El Progreso (El Semillero), in the location of the Luz de Bella Vista Adventist Church, from September to November, in four work sessions of 1.5 hours, approximately, from September 5th to November 14th with intervals of 15 days in between sessions including an initial individual interview (week of September 5th), a final interview (week of November 7th) of approximately 30-45 mins each, and a final focus group session (November 14th).

In addition to the four sessions, the participant will be invited to participate in two individual 30-45 minutes interviews (one at the beginning of the project and another at the end) and four three-minute satisfaction surveys about the dynamic of the program at the end of each of the four workshops. All interviews and work sessions will be audio-recorded for exclusive research purposes and will only be used by the researcher for the exclusive purpose of the research. No personal names of participants will be present in the research or any document. The information will be protected with a security code so that there is no possibility of being used by anyone else.

Participants can withdraw from the study at any time and contact the principal researcher, Professor Pérez, with any questions, complaints, or queries.

I, _____, have read, understood, and voluntarily accepted to participate in this research project with the characteristics described above.

Date:

Formulario de consentimiento informado

Título de la investigación:

Impugnar la realidad: proyecto de investigación acción para la exploración de desarrollo de una pedagogía democrática para el aprendizaje comunitario en contexto de pobreza en República Dominicana.

Impeaching Reality: An action-research study exploring the development of a democratic pedagogy for a community-based learning in a context of poverty in the Dominican Republic

Principal investigator:

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¡Hola!

Te invito a participar de este proyecto de investigación-acción titulado Impugnar la realidad, que se desarrollará en la comunidad de El Progreso. El proyecto está diseñado para miembros de la comunidad. La participación es totalmente voluntaria y es gratis. No tienes que pagar nada para participar.

Este proyecto busca investigar y conocer los problemas de tu comunidad para encontrar posibles soluciones a ellos, desde la práctica democrática y el saber sociológico. El proyecto incluye cuatro talleres, donde se impartirán clases sobre, primero: qué es una comunidad (cómo funciona) y qué es una democracia local (y cuáles son sus principios), y cómo ella puede organizar mejor las acciones de una comunidad. Un segundo taller abordará el significado de las ciencias sociales, sus técnicas y métodos de investigación, y cómo puede servirle a una Junta de Vecinos en un contexto comunitario con necesidades materiales y sociales. Un tercero sobre análisis de las realidades de comunidad de El Progreso (desde las estadísticas del SIUBEN). Habrá una sesión final de presentación de planes de acción para la mejora de los problemas de la comunidad.

Este proyecto de investigación forma parte de una tesis doctoral del profesor Juan Miguel Pérez, en la Universidad de Columbia (Nueva York), que busca unir saber social, prácticas democráticas y trabajo comunitario, en especial desde la Juntas de Vecinos de comunidades con necesidades. El trabajo de esta tesis se realizará en coordinación con la Junta de Vecinos de El Progreso (El Semillero), en los locales de la Iglesia Adventista Luz de Bella Vista, durante los meses de septiembre a noviembre, en cuatro sesiones de trabajo de 1 hora y 30 minutos de duración,

aproximadamente, desde el 5 de septiembre hasta el 14 de noviembre, con intervalos de 15 días entre una sesión y otra, incluyendo una entrevista individual inicial (semana del 5 de septiembre) y otra final (semana del 7 de noviembre) de aproximadamente 30-45 minutos cada una, y una sesión final de grupo focal (14 de noviembre). Desde el primer taller, los participantes serán invitados a formar pequeños grupos de tres y pertenecer a uno de ellos para investigar un aspecto específico de la realidad social de su comunidad (Por ejemplo: condiciones de salubridad pública y salud personal, cuidado de las personas, educación, situaciones de empleo y formación laboral, grados de organización la Junta de Vecinos, situaciones de convivencia, entre otros.). Al final del proyecto, cada grupo presentará un trabajo de diagnóstico y posibles soluciones a la realidad investigada.

Un certificado de participación será entregado al final del proyecto.

En adición a los cuatro talleres, el participante será invitado a participar de dos entrevistas individuales de 30 - 45 minutos (una al inicio del proyecto y otra al final) y de cuatro encuestas verbales de satisfacción sobre el curso, de tres minutos, al finalizar cada uno de los cuatro talleres. Todas las entrevistas y las sesiones de trabajo serán grabadas en audio para fines exclusivos de la investigación y solo serán del uso del investigador para los propósitos de la tesis. Ningún nombre propio de los participantes estará presente en la investigación ni en ningún documento. Las informaciones serán resguardadas con clave de seguridad para que no exista ninguna posibilidad de ser usada por nadie más.

En cualquier momento, los participantes pueden abandonar su participación, y en cualquier momento pueden dirigirse al investigador principal, el profesor Pérez, para cualquier duda, queja o consulta que quiera realizar.

Si acepta de participar en el proyecto con las características antes descritas, por favor llenar la siguiente línea.

Yo, _____, he leído, entendido y aceptado de forma voluntaria participar de este proyecto de investigación, con las características más arriba descritas.

Fecha: