Engaging, Empowering, and Enabling Youth to Lead Social Action in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro

A Program Impact Evaluation

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About the Poverty, Violence and Governance Lab (PovGov)

The Poverty, Violence and Governance Lab (PovGov) at Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) is dedicated to the study of the underlying causes and devastating consequences of criminal violence in the developing world, and to the design and evaluation of interventions that reduce crime and improve security in areas of weak governance. Our research team employs a multi-method research strategy that incorporates statistical and spatial analyses using observational data, experimental designs, and in-depth qualitative ethnographic fieldwork to gain critical insights into the links between criminal violence, law enforcement policies and practices, and the well-being of citizens. With a focus on Latin America, where more than 30% of the world's homicides occur, our Lab leverage those insights to evaluate the impact of programs and to propose new approaches aimed at reducing violence, improving policing, mitigating human rights abuses, strengthening local governance, and providing educational and employment opportunities for at-risk youth.

Established in 2010 and led by political scientist and FSI Senior Fellow Beatriz Magaloni, with key collaborators from across Stanford, PovGov has conducted numerous research projects partnering with researchers at local universities, government agencies, and NGOs who seek advice and expertise in the design, implementation, or evaluation of government interventions designed to improve governance and well-being. The Program also serves as a critical training ground for doctoral students, undergraduates, and post-doctoral scholars, and includes an active outreach program of conferences and workshops in the U.S. and abroad. PovGov's research agenda is organized around four research areas: criminal violence, governance, health, and education – the latter being the focus area of this impact evaluation study.

Poverty, lack of economic growth, youth unemployment and lack of education are some of the factors scholars have argued predicts violence. These factors fuel violence and crime because they decrease the financial benefits potential perpetrators can expect from available legal opportunities. In countries disproportionately affected by criminal violence, there is an urgency to advance educational, cultural, and employment programs to benefit young people. Vulnerable youth commonly experience stagnating educational attainment, high unemployment, limited access to high-quality jobs, and they are at greater risk of becoming affected by criminal violence. Our work aims to study formal and non-formal educational and cognitive-behavioral programs aimed at boosting students' engagement in school, improving technical skills, and engaging in a process of individual and social transformation to empower youth to escape violence.

To lear more about PovGov please visit: https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/povgov.

Executive Summary

This study is the result of over four years of active collaboration between the Poverty, Violence and Governance Lab (PovGov) and the Rio-based NGO Agency for Youth Networks (hereafter, Agency). What began in 2012 as an informal conversation between PovGov researchers and the program's founder and director, Marcus Faustini, led to a solid partnership that has produced not only this research but also opportunities for engagement through events both in California and in Rio de Janeiro. A central objective of PovGov's research agenda is to assess and disseminate knowledge about initiatives and policies seeking to benefit socially vulnerable populations throughout Latin America. Agency's target population – namely, young people from the favelas and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro who often find themselves unemployed, out of school, and exposed to high levels of violence – being of great relevance to PovGov's work.

During a 2015 conference hosted by PovGov at the Stanford Center on Democracy, Develoment, and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) entitled "Educational and Entrepreneurial Initiatives to Support Youth in Places of Violence," several Agency educators and participants shared their experiences in the program. They expanded on its mission, challenges, and relevance considering the scenario of vulnerability and limited opportunities that young people face not only in Rio de Janeiro but throughout Brazil. It became clear then that the approach, experience, and impact of Agency's innovative methodology – which engages young people in marginalized communities as protagonists in the creation and implementation of projects with a potential for social impact – should be analyzed in-depth, with the work beginning promptly after. Employing a mixed-method strategy based on quasi-experimental and non-experimental designs, to build our program impact evaluation, we drew from survey responses from 500 people, as well as interviews, observations, and informational documents of various kinds.

The results, culminated in this report, come down to four learning summaries which speak to methodology and curriculum (Agency's methodology promotes active learning for project creation while strengthening pathways for individual empowerment and community engagement); the profile of program participants (Agency is engaging some of the most vulnerable – but also resilient and hopeful – youth groups in Rio de Janeiro); participant experience (Agency provides participants with tools to increase their life-skills, networks, urban mobility, community engagement, and entrepreneurial competencies); and impact evaluation (participation in the Agency program has a positive impact on several dimensions of employment, business development, social engagement, and individual empowerment). Ultimately, our study has demonstrated that Agency's youth-inclusive methodology is successful in deepening refection and facilitating action for meaningful youth-led processes of community change to take place, while promoting mechanisms and pathways for young people to learn, reflect on their experiences, express themselves, amplify their voices, and become protagonists of the changes they want to see.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the institutional support of the Agency for Youth Networks program and its founder, Marcus Faustini, who gave us complete access to their educational platform and internal data required to conduct the research. In addition, he facilitated our engagement with program staff, participants, and various collaborators from civil society, government, and academia. The contributions of Veruska Delfino and Sara Rizzo were also essential to the realization of this project. Together, they led the data collection process in Rio de Janeiro, organizing the logistics necessary, hiring and training survey facilitators, entering data, as well as setting up and helping carry out focal groups and interviews with participant youth. Furthermore, Sara Rizzo was responsible for conducting a detailed systematization of the Agency methodology, which fed directly into this report as the central documentation of Agency's curriculum.

We thank them, as well as Ana Paula Lisboa, for providing us with timely and insightful feedback on our survey instruments for data collection, allowing us to best adapt our questionnaires to the realities of participants (and favela youth, in general) and to issues relevant to the program in terms of their own assessment needs. Additionally, we would like to thank Valquíria Oliveira, Hanier Ferrer, Karina Rodrigues, Rebecca Vieira, Aline Resende and all of Agency's coordination and administrative team who in some way contributed to the successful execution of this project. Internally, we extend our thanks to Dr. Brenda Jarillo, a former post-doctoral researcher at PovGov who supported us in the first stages of the research, and Pedro Dantas, former graduate student at the Stanford Graduate School of Education, who helped us organize and clean some of our survey data sets.

A special thanks to Vanessa Melo, former Project Manager and Researcher at PovGov, for setting up all the logistics for the study and providing research insights (including giving contributions to data collection instrument design) and administrative support through all stages of the study. We also thank Renata Cavalcanti Muniz for assisting us with the translation of this report to Portuguese. Finally, we thank the hundreds of young people participating in our interviews and surveys, whose opinions, experiences, and meaning-making accounts constitute the heart of this work. To all the individuals mentioned above and the many more who took part in this research somehow: our immense gratitude and respect.

Table of Contents

About the Poverty, Violence and Governance Lab (PovGov)..... 2
Executive summary..... 3
Ackowledgments..... 4
List of figures and tables..... 6
Section 1: Study underpinnings..... **8**
1.1. Background to the study..... 8
1.2. Insights from the literature..... 11
1.3. Conceptual framework..... 13
1.4. Study design and methods..... 15
1.5. Structure of the report..... 16
Section 2: The program 'Agency for Youth Networks'..... **18**
2.1. Program description and main goals..... 18
2.2. Inspirations for the methodology..... 20
2.3. Target population..... 25
2.4. Coordination and mentoring team..... 28
2.5. Educational instruments and activities..... 32
Section 3: The profile of participant youth..... **41**
3.1. Sociodemographic characteristics..... 41
3.2. Education and employment..... 44
3.3. Exposure to violence..... 47
3.4. Family, community life, and the urban experience..... 49
3.5. Personality and well-being..... 51
Section 4: Participant experience and program outcomes..... **55**
4.1. First contact, motivation, and overall program experience..... 55
4.2. Participant's perception of benefits gained and life skills developed..... 57
4.3. Entrepreneurial stimulus and competencies..... 61
4.4. Community and city-wide engagement..... 64
4.5. Projects created and territorial impact..... 67
Section 5: Impact evaluation..... **72**
5.1. Impact evaluation design and sampling strategies..... 72
5.2. Geographical distribution..... 73
5.3. Business development..... 74
5.4. Community engagement..... 75
5.5. Personal empowerment..... 77
Conclusion..... **80**
Learning summaries and key takeaways..... 80
Limitations and directions for future research..... 86
References..... 89
Appendix..... 94

List of figures and tables

Table 1. Percentage of participants per community..... 41
Table 2. Participant's age range..... 41
Table 3. Participant's sex..... 42
Table 4. Participant's reported race or color..... 42
Table 5. Participants' religion..... 42
Table 6. Church attendance frequency..... 42
Table 7. Home amenities..... 43
Table 8. Participant's living situation..... 43
Table 9. Personal items..... 43
Table 10. Social media presence..... 43
Table 11. Highest level of education achieved by repondent's and their parents..... 45
Table 12. Participant's employment status..... 46
Table 13. Participant's monthly income per minimum salary..... 46
Table 14. Informal employment snapshot..... 46
Table 15. Summary of violent incidents experienced during childhood/adolescence..... 48
Table 16. Examples of violence in the community surroundings..... 48
Table 17. Perceptions about the Pacification security policy and police work..... 49
Table 18. Relationship with the community..... 50
Table 19. Urban experience..... 51
Table 20. Self-perception and self-steem..... 52
Table 21. Mood state..... 53
Table 22. Program engagement and learning aspects participants liked the most..... 56
Table 23. Self-reported life-skills developed through Agency..... 58
Table 24. Self-reported benefits gained through Agency..... 59
Table 25. Comparative of places visited by participants pre-and-post intervention..... 60
Table 26. Entrepreneurial activities carried out by participants..... 62
Table 27. Contact with individuals who helped stimulate entrepreneurial activities..... 63
Table 28. Reported level of difficulty performing selected project-related tasks..... 63
Table 29. Participation in community activities..... 65
Table 30. Percentage of participants in formal employment..... 74
Table 31. Participants who opened their business in the last 3 mo..... 74
Table 32. Participants who tried to open their own business in the last 3 mo but failed..... 74
Table 33. Participants who engaged in activities to open a business in the last 3 mo..... 74
Table 34. Participants who in the last 3 mo met w/ residents to discuss community problems..... 76
Table 35. Participants who, in the last 3 months, organized a meeting in the commty..... 76
Table 36. Participants who in the last 3 mo took part in social work to help the commty..... 76
Table 37. Participants who in last 3 mo felt that their life experiences/knowledge were valued... 77
Table 38. Participants who in last 3 mo felt confortable to discuss an idea/issue w/ strangers..... 78
Figure 1. Projects developed through the Agency methodology..... 70
Figure 2. Location of treatment and control sample..... 73


Master

Section 1: Study Underpinnings

1.1. Background to the study

Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, is a country of glaring inequality. Despite recent efforts to reduce poverty through a series of social strategies and income redistribution policies, the gap between the rich and the poor remains monumental. While it is estimated that 25,4% of Brazilians live in poverty, out of which 6,5 live in extreme poverty (earning up to $5,5 and $1,9 per day, respectively) (IBGE, 2017), a recent study by Oxfam found that a handful of multi-millionaires hold as much wealth as the country's 100,00 poorest people or nearly half of Brazil's entire population. Inequality is pervasive not only through social classes but also through gender and race lines. As per the same study, women can expect to earn as much money as men by 2047 and blacks as much as whites by 2089 (Oxfam, 2017). The last nation in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, having trafficked over 4.5 million Africans to its shores (more than North America and the Caribbean combined), Brazil's legacy of exploitation and dehumanization is still very much ingrained in its contemporary society (Park, 2013).[1]

Not only are blacks more likely to earn less, be poor, illiterate, low-educated, reside in informal settlements and have weak media and political representation, but they are also disproportionately impacted by violence (IPEA, 2016; Souza, 2014). Mirroring the experience of its Latin American counterparts, Brazil's overall levels of lethal violence are amongst some of the highest. The country is home to 20 of the top 50 most dangerous cities worldwide, and although it displays a population of little over 205 million, it accounts for 10% of the total share of homicides committed globally (CCPSCJ, 2014; Roque and Abramovay, 2014). Albeit chronic and widespread, lethal violence does not affect all Brazilian citizens equally. Victims can be defined by their gender, age, race, and social class. Over half of the roughly 60,000 homicides taking place in the country each year victimize youth aged 15-29, 77% of whom are black and 93.4% males. This translates to the loss of seven young lives every two hours (Waiselfisz, 2015). In addition, roughly 62% of Brazil's prison population, the fourth largest in the world, is comprised of blacks and pardos (mixed-race), 55% of whom are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Ministério da Justiça e Cidadania, 2015).

In Rio de Janeiro, the so-called "marvelous city," black young men are also more vulnerable to lethal violence. Considering 4,043 registered homicides in 2012, 1,418 victimized young individuals, out of whom 1,078 were black. In this former Olympic capital, the risk of being the victim of homicide for male youths is 14 times higher than for other groups, and three times

[1] Parts of the introductory section and several other segments of this report borrow directly from Veriene Melo's doctoral dissertation entitled "Pathways of hope for the favela youth: A case study of emancipatory education as a tool for individual and community transformation" (UCLA GSE&IS, 2018). The author holds the copyrights to the work and has approved its use in this report.

higher for blacks (Waiselfisz, 2015). Most of these killings occur in peripheries and poverty-stricken communities known in Brazil as "favelas" (slums or shantytowns).[2] Notorious for their high levels of criminal violence and lack of basic infrastructure, historically, social investments in these territories have been scarce, and when policies targeting these communities do get put into action, they are mostly tied to military and police strategies for public security – an approach that speaks volumes to how the state views favela dwellers.

By 2016, the most comprehensive of these initiatives, the Pacification security policy set into motion a decade ago – which involves the establishment of fixed police units (and, at times, army forces) inside territories and, in theory, investments in social initiatives also – had reached 264 different communities across 38 favelas, relying on a contingent of 9,500 newly-trained police officers supposedly exposed to notions of proximity policing (Governo do Rio de Janeiro, n/d). Nonetheless, as the Pacification's recent institutional and public downfall make clear, increased police presence – particularly if devoid of policies to expand and strengthen social safety nets – does not necessarily translate to more security and greater citizen well-being. The iron-fisted work carried out by PMERJ (Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro) in favelas only adds fuel to a scenario of extreme violence and high victimization. PMERJ – known as one of the most lethal police forces in the world depicted in popular movies such as City of God (2002) and Elite Squad (2007) – often resorts to racial profiling and extreme violence against favela dwellers, particularly the black youth. Human Rights Watch attributes 8,000 deaths to them in the last decade. In 2015 alone, 3/4 of the 645 victims of police killings in Rio were black (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

For young favela residents, a reality of social vulnerability and a routine of security instability is further aggravated by the lack of opportunities for life advancement. The NEET (not in education, employment or training) phenomenon is widespread in these communities. It's estimated that over 34% of youth and young adults aged 18-29 living in favelas impacted by the pacification security policy are NEETs, compared to the national average of 24% – although the comprehensive figures are likely much higher (Abdala, 2014; Lima 2013). In addition, Rio favelas are amongst the territories with the highest rates of school evasion in the city: 10,3% of children aged 6-14 living in the five most populous favelas in Rio do not frequent school, compared to the city average of 3% (in Rocinha, the largest favela in Latin America home to 80,000 dwellers, this number is as high as 17,1%) (Telles, 2014). Along these lines, the proportion of people who never attended school in these communities is almost twice as high as in other urban areas of the city: 8,8% compared to 4,7% (Saraiva and Soares, 2013).

The fact that so many youths and young adults living in Rio favelas and historically underserved peripheries throughout the city are not engaged in a productive activity and are out of school

[2] An urban phenomenon visible beyond Rio de Janeiro, 88% of Brazilian favelas are concentrated in 20 of the 36 metropolitan regions in the country, its 11,5 million inhabitants accounting for 6% of the total population (Cavallieri and Vial, 2012; IBGE, 2010).

is aggravated by the prominence of drug trafficking factions in these territories. With scarce options for quality education, low prospects for gainful employment and the possibility for future economic sustainability, and a high exposure to discrimination and exclusion, joining criminal groups may seem like an attractive option for young people, despite its palpable dangers. As a popular saying goes, "jail or the cemetery" are the two possible fates for individuals who get caught in a spiral of crime and violence. Amongst the "general population," prompted by high levels of urban violence, feelings of fear, anxiety, and anger are commonplace, with a recent survey carried out by Cândido Mendes University revealing that 35% of Rio residents (or one in three) agree with the popular phrase "a good crook is a dead crook" (Coelho, 2017).

Essentially, the politics of representation of favela dwellers (which tends to portray them as untrustworthy and prone to crime) and the culture of marginalization of the poor, help create a dangerous permissiveness of violence that, in turn, give room to repression and militarized actions, while confining these territories to invisibility and intense social exclusion (Gandra, 2015; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015; Sousa e Silva, 2014). Geographical lines, but also social barriers, separate citizens who live in the poorest areas of the city from those in the more affluent neighborhoods, or the "asphalt," as favela dwellers commonly refer to spaces extending beyond peripheral enclaves. This physical and symbolic segregation gives rise to a "parted city" where citizen relations are continuously weakened and where the extent to which people have access to basic rights – and the kind of state treatment they are most likely to receive – is determined by their address.

It is within this complex context that we situate our study. The lack of investment in platforms to amplify the social, economic, and political participation of favela dwellers, coupled with the marginalization of the urban poor (or a "myth that has evolved to reality," as Janice Perlman puts it) (Perlman, 2010), has resulted in generations of people plagued by poverty, violence, and hopelessness. Being that favelas are home to a relatively young population – a trend which is only expected to grow (Beltrão and Sugahara, 2016; IBGE, 2010) – as part of strengthening the institutional and social policy framework needed to foster change in these territories, there is an urgency to further advance educational, cultural, and employment programs to benefit young people, and to find innovative ways to attract them and keep them engaged.

And yet, if the ambition is to pave the way for meaningful bottom-up social transformation, it is important that efforts in youth development and empowerment are embedded in a larger movement for social justice committed to helping young people succeed and become subjects of their own lives, from an approach that incorporates their experiences, knowledge, and social history into any social action created in their name or meant to truly benefit them. Considering that education plays a key role in transforming societies, with the potential of performing emancipatory functions depending on the demands of the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts in which it is implemented (Desjardins, 2015), within the microcosm of the Agency

program and Rio's favelas, this study focuses on educational practices operating beyond the individual level to also incorporate community change.

1.2. Insights from the literature

Young people are mobilizers and agents of transformation, responding to the opportunities and challenges they face with bravery and resilience at different points in time. From the splurge of pro-democracy youth-led campaigns in the Middle East, to the occupy movement in the U.S. and anti-corruption demonstrations in Latin America, youth have continuously helped shape world politics, leading social and political transformation through waves of resistance demanding increased equality, representation, social justice and respect for human rights (Fominaya, 2013). At the heart of important progressive social movements worldwide (i.e. U.S. civil rights movement, feminism struggles, LGBT and environmental justice advancements, immigration, labor, anti-slavery and anti-war movements), we find millions of energetic and active youth with hopes to change the world for themselves and future generations (Costanza-Chock, 2012).

With the exponential growth in access to mobile phones and the explosion of the new media, young people are now more interconnected and active than ever, their voices and concerns laid bare to the world. Through participation in various social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, even those living in poor communities can now more easily organize, publicize their initiatives, denounce human rights violations and demand action from their respective states and society at large in a way that bypasses traditional participation structures and institutions (The Commonwealth, 2016). Young people also make use of new forms of media to get in touch with their own interests and needs, which has increasingly included social movement-oriented inclinations - a trend that is only expected to grow (Costanza-Chock, 2012). As interconnectivity and access to technology progress, we enter a new age of accountability and transparency, where the social injustices, abuse, and neglect suffered by particular groups and individuals around the world can no longer be so easily dismissed or hidden.

Contrary to mainstream discourses around the "typical adolescent," which tends to portray young people as disengaged, apathetic to other people's struggles and uninterested in taking part in civic engagement activities, past and contemporary history has proved that youth have a strong capacity (and will) to mobilize for change - and there are several reasons motivating such attitude. Studies have found that, regardless of their political orientation and specific ideologies (from the extreme right or left-wing to anarchical), young people take part in social movements because there is a true belief in contributing to changing the world (EU, 2015; Murer, 2011). Also, youth feel the need to act because they are being disproportionately affected by exclusion and marginalization, facing limited quality educational opportunities, unemployment and underemployment at a higher rate than adults, lack of access to affordable housing, scarce credit, and more (Fominaya, 2013; OECD, 2017; The Commonwealth, 2016).

In addition, globally, around one-third of youth live in fragile and conflict-affected states, bearing the burden of war and violence in proportions unlike that of any other group (The Commonwealth, 2016). There are also layers of marginalization within youth populations, with exclusion being most acute amongst those holding minority status, including ethnic and indigenous people, the disabled, women, refugees, migrants, LGBTQI and the poor (Offerdahl, et.al., 2014). A direct consequence of social, economic and policy barriers, as an age cohort, youth are less likely to take part in governance and decision-making processes, their inclusion being, arguably, one of the greatest challenges of our contemporary societies (OECD, 2017; The Commonwealth, 2016).

In the late 1980s, the youth thematic started to gain space in the agenda of international organizations and in the governmental groundwork of several countries around the developed and developing world (Secretaria Nacional de Juventude, 2014). In 1995, notably, the United Nations General Assembly adopted The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which provided a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the lives of young people worldwide in fifteen priority areas including education, employment, substance abuse, girls and young women, amongst others (Offerdahl, et.al., 2014; United Nations, 2010). Since then, youth-related issues have secured their prominence in international development discussions, becoming as high of a priority today as it has ever been (The Commonwealth, 2016).

This is evidenced in the continuous advancement of important schemes prioritizing youth development in policy and action, including the establishment of the role of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on youth in 2013, the creation of national authorities responsible for young people in 190 countries, the involvement of development agencies and a multitude of NGOs in youth work, as well as the promotion of various youth summits and international plans of action dedicated to this particular population (UNDP, 2014; The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9). Responding to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of youth inclusion and exclusion (OECD, 2017), work in this field involves a series of strategies and programs covering nearly all aspects of life that impact young people's well-being, from education and labour market training, cognitive and non-cognitive development, to democratic representation, resilience-building, entrepreneurship, arts and culture, sports, health, and the environment (UNESCO, 2017; UNDP, 2014). Platforms where these activities materialize are as diverse as their focus, taking place inside, alongside, and outside the formal system of education and training (AEGEE, 2007; Baker, 2013; Durlak and Weissberg, 2013; García, 2014).

These larger and multifaceted efforts are, however, still insufficient, not only considering the growing numbers of youth relative to the general population but also due to the decisive impact young people have on the overall development and progress of countries worldwide (OECD, 2017). ECLAC notes that despite its tremendous importance, the youth life stage is still "largely

invisible in public policy and, when references are made to young people, they appear as the object of policies and not as rights-holders or agents of development and productive change" (ECLAC, 2016, p. 46). An example of this is found in institutional responses to youth crime and violence, which generally involve a contradictory mix of debates and measures along the lines of either preventive/remedial approaches or harsher disciplinary/punitive frameworks.

While academics, health specialists, NGOs, grassroots groups, and activists have continuously pushed for a humanistic focus on crime prevention through social development strategies (including employment, cultural and educational opportunities), national criminal justice systems and regulatory frameworks tend to favour investments in "get tough" policies, which translate to more severe punishments and increased ostensive policing in efforts to reduce the rates of juvenile violent crime (Wortley et al, 2008). That is, young people facing social risk and exclusion are largely portrayed in public and political discourses as a problem to be dealt with through punitive policies, rather than subjects capable of becoming a fundamental part of the solution if given the right tools.

Essentially, being the ones who in fact experience, understand, and endure everyday challenges, young people must be regarded as a positive consultative and participatory force for transformational change, and not as mere beneficiaries of the work that is carried out in their names (UNESCO, 2017). Considering that social, economic, and political contexts (together with inappropriate policies) can limit young people's capabilities and their full participation in civic life, positive youth development that leads to empowerment requires youth to be placed at the "heart of their own development" (Ledford, et al., 2013; The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9). Development efforts “for youth, with youth, and by youth,” therefore, must help enhance the status of young people and empower them to build on their competencies and capabilities, while challenging the barriers that prevent them from enjoying their rights, participating in decision-making processes, and becoming active citizens (OXFAM, 2016; The Commonwealth, 2016).

In all, there is little doubt that in order to build fairer and more equal societies all around the globe, we must strive to give young people – regardless of their country of residence, social standing, race, or background – a fair chance to reach their full potential and become agents of social and economic progress (Oxfam, 2016; OECD, 2017). Childhood marks the phase when the foundations for one's future development are set, but it is during adolescence that social inequalities may be widened or reduced. Hence, without adequate investments in policies and interventions to promote the full inclusion of young people, poverty patterns, uneven life paths, and infringement of their rights are unlikely to change (ECLAC, 2016).

1.3. Conceptual framework

A central argument motivating this study is that we are encountering a legitimate crisis for

young people growing up all over the world, who have very few resources and opportunities to carve a life path and find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence. Educational and labor market disadvantages are particularly high amongst youth from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds, which, added to the experience of living in crime-rampant territories, intensifies social instability amongst this population, decreasing their chances to escape vulnerability and feeding into uncertainties about the future.

Youth development initiatives must, therefore, help prepare young people to navigate obstacles and provide them support so they can overcome their social limitations and take part in changing their present life conditions. A way to set this process into motion is through the advancement of increased opportunities for decent work, training, and education that allows young individuals to build valuable career and life skills while earning a livable income. And yet, just as important, these platforms must also facilitate young people's cultivation of their "sense of place" in the world, working to ensure that they are given a fair chance to act on their capacities and lay the foundations for a better future, not only for themselves but also through involvement in actions which can benefit those around them.

Several theoretical approaches grounded in notions of social justice, grassroots development, and praxis[3] help us situate our study within larger frameworks of youth work from a perspective of social transformation. Paulo Freire's emancipatory education, for example, is a mechanism for the educational and political empowerment of marginalized groups that places education front and center in the struggle for social change. Through the promotion of a problem-posing education, dialogic learning, and a curriculum that speaks to people's realities, amongst other pedagogical practices, people of all ages and walks of life are invited to closely analyze and reflect on their living and social conditions as a pathway to consciousness-raising and social action. For work involving young people, the approach provides a theoretical and practical framework to inspire the design of strategies to help capacitate, empower, and more actively engage youth in development processes as the thinkers and drivers of social transformation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011, Torres, 2013).

Similarly, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is a methodology that positions young people at the center of action-oriented research processes, from selecting the topic to be investigated to collecting data, analyzing it, and drafting reporting of findings. Central to YPAR is the investigation into the nature of problems affecting youth and their communities – as they see relevant – and the use of such knowledge to inform advocacy efforts and social action, with young people playing a role of leadership while improving their personal development and self-reflection (Ozer and Douglas, 2015). Finally, literature on empowerment provide us with a frame of reference for the discussion of youth empowerment processes, capacity building, and

[3] The continuous dialect between reflection and action; engagement in informed action upon the world. For more see Freire 1970.

the greater exercise of agency beyond the individual level to also include contributions to positive community development and socio-political change (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2009; Inglis, 1997; Jennings et. al., 2006; Ledford et. al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2000).

Drawing from similar theoretical constructs, growing efforts have promoted the use of research-based evidence in the shaping of youth policy, practice, and funding priorities, based on the analysis and understanding of experiences, practices, and context-sensitive recommendations stemming from work developed closely with (or by) young people themselves (Seymour et.al., 2017). Contributing to this scenario, the main objective of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of an initiative that engages young people in marginalized communities as protagonists in the creation and implementation of projects with a potential for social impact, helping paint a picture of youth empowerment processes and youth-led action as they take shape on the ground, in their opportunities and limitations.

1.4. Study design and methods

In this study, we use a mix of quantitative and qualitative strategies to dissect and analyze the youth strategy at the core of this investigation. We systematize the methodology and curriculum employed by Agency, set the profile of young participants, explore their experiences in the program, consider developments in life-skills, tools for engagement, and entrepreneurial competencies, introduce outcomes at the community level, and finally, survey into comparative assessment outcomes. Employing a mixed-method approach to impact evaluation based on quasi-experimental and non-experimental designs, to build our analysis, we draw mainly from survey responses from roughly 500 young people – quantitative results which are supported by a review of qualitative data, observations, and informational documents of various kinds. Below is a detailed description of all data sets informing our analytical process and findings.

Data sets used for the descriptive portions of the study and our quasi-experimental evaluation case series analysis include:

- Survey responses from 52 participant youth from distinct cycles (2011-2014), post-intervention;
- Survey responses from 217 participant youth from the 2015 cycle, pre-and-post intervention;
- Survey responses from 117 participant youth from the 2016 cycle, pre-and-post intervention;
- Survey responses from 106 participant youth from the 2016 cycle, pre, mid-way, and post-intervention (additional questionnaire);
- Focus group with 12 participant youth from distinct cycles (2011-2015), post-intervention;
- Focus group with 9 participant youth from the 2016 cycle, pre, mid-way, and post-intervention;
- Informal interviews and conversations with program staff and participants, in addition to occasional observations over a three-year period (2014-2016);
- A systematization of all educational instruments used in the methodology built over a one-year

period of direct observation;
- Analysis of internal informational documents and data sets;
- Analysis of public institutional and donor reports;
- Analysis of social media content and audio-visual material.

Data sets used for the quasi-experimental impact evaluation include:

- Survey responses from 117 participant youth from the 2016 cycle, pre-and-post intervention;
- Survey responses from a control group of 120 youth, collected within ten days of the total period of participants' pre-and-post intervention.

1.5. Structure of the report

Our analysis of Agency is laid down in the next four sections. Section 2 introduces the program in detail, including a review of its main goals and objectives, presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks inspiring the methodology, as well as the youth population targeted and the team of educators involved, and concludes with a systematized typology of the educational instruments applied at different stages in the methodology and their related activities. Section 3 is dedicated to unveiling the profile of participant youth, providing descriptive information on sociodemographic characteristics, education and employment conditions, exposure to violence growing up and daily, various experiences connected to family, community, and urban life, as well as personality traits and state of well-being.

The evaluation segment of the study begins in section 4; following an investigation of overall program experience, including first contact and motivation to join, the focus is placed on exploring participants' self-reported perceptions of benefits gained, life skills strengthened, and entrepreneurial competencies developed inside the methodology (some variables examined pre-and-post intervention), in addition to changes in community and city-wide engagement and brief look into outcomes in terms of project creation and territorial impact.

Finally, section 5 introduces the results from the impact evaluation. First, the geographical distribution of study participants (both treatment and control groups) within the city of Rio de Janeiro is laid down, followed by an assessment of the impact of the intervention in young people's lives in what relates to strengthened pathways for business development and employment, increased social engagement, and improved personal well-being. The report concludes with a highlight of key takeaways from the study, a discussion of limitations, and an overview of recommendations with potential relevance to policy-making and future research.


PONTÃO DE
CULTURA
REALIZAÇÃO

Section 2: The Program 'Agency for Youth Networks'

2.1. Program description and main goals

The Agency program is one of the initiatives established by the Social Creativity Institute Avenida Brasil, an NGO based in Rio de Janeiro that seeks to promote the artistic and cultural expression of residents of the city's many favelas and peripheries.[4] [5] A central notion guiding their work maintains that to break stereotypes and negative perceptions about dwellers – which tends to be driven by assumptions of criminality and precariousness – it is essential to focus on the subjectivities and diversity of expression found in those communities at the margins and to stimulate the emergence of new narratives. The struggle consists in reversing the paradigm associated with these communities as places of need and disorder, by rethinking and presenting them as territories brimming with potential for incubating new solutions and ideas to contemporary social challenges. Combining elements of arts and social action, their projects encourage the protagonism and artistic production of historically marginalized and socioeconomically-vulnerable groups of young people through the advancement of strategies to reduce inequality and expand access to city-wide opportunities.

Guided by these ideals, in 2011, Marcus Vinícius Faustini – a film-maker, published author, and director recognized as an important figure in the arts and culture urban scene in Rio de Janeiro – founded Agency as a response to the very difficulties he experienced growing up in a Rio favela, while motivated by the new world that opened before him once he was given the opportunity to experiment and create beyond the limitations of his immediate life. Highlighting the importance of fighting for the creation of spaces for human flourishing outside the logic of neoliberalism and market production as it relates to the plight of marginalized youth in Rio de Janeiro, Faustini notes:

> "The peripheral youth suffer much from this capitalistic society that wants to control bodies so they can serve as market reserves. Bodies that do not act upon their desires and that are submitted to a single logic of existence inside the market. Then, why to intervene in this space from the perspective of youth? Because, above all, to make poor people work 12 hours a day in their youth is to condemn them to be poor for the rest of their lives, seeing that it is in our youth that we create the best experiences, combinations, and encounters, opening our repertoire and networks" (Faustini, 2013).

[4] This section draws from a program systematization conducted by Sara Rizzo, one of the co-authors of the report, who spent over one year doing fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, collecting data, and engaging with Agency staff and participants. We also gathered information about the methodology from a 2015 book authored by Ana Paula Lisboa and Veruska Delfino, senior coordinators in the program, which expand on the main proposals and practices guiding Agency's work.

[5] For more information on Agency, please visit their official website: http://agenciarj.org/ (available only in Portuguese).

The Agency program is, therefore, a platform that works to expand the field of engagement and active participation of favela and peripheral youth by getting them involved in local development processes and social entrepreneurship activities. Openly rejecting “pre-determined menus" generally adopted by top-down provisions in favelas that approach dwellers as objects of social action, Agency recognizes young people as conscious, knowledgeable, and creative subjects capable of intervening in the territory as protagonists and change-makers. On that premise, the program advances a capacity-building methodology (the so-called ‘stimulus cycle’) that guides participants into formulating, developing, and presenting innovative business ideas that are relevant to their territories, presenting and engaging them as essential actors of urban transformation.

Every week for a period of two months, participants are introduced to different educational instruments and elements (detailed in section 2.5) meant to stimulate them to cultivate their interests and ideas, discover and develop their skills, and draw from their knowledge and social history to find solutions to local community challenges. During this process, in addition to providing participants with entrepreneurial training, networks, and tools for engagement, the program seeks to motivate youth to expand their institutional dialogue and more fully exercise their right to the city. To encourage and enable young people to take part in the program, Agency provides participants with an allowance for transportation and food to all meetings and a monthly stipend of R$100 ($31), which is also symbolic of a modest – but important – financial autonomy.

At the end of the stimulus cycle, once projects have been put together conceptually and logistically, an external committee composed of important cultural, political, and civil society actors select the projects that will move on to the execution phase. Groups of participants whose proposals are successful are awarded a grant of R$10,000 ($3,123) to be spent during a three-month pilot period, which is when they turn their ideas into action. Throughout the entire stimulus cycle and up to the execution phase, participants are regularly assisted by tutors and mentors who guide them through the educational process, sharing competencies for project creation, and encouraging them to realize and act upon their knowledge and abilities (more on educators in section 2.3).

In 2011, Agency was awarded an inaugural financial package from Petrobrás, Brazil's semi-public oil giant, subsequently receiving funding from Rio de Janeiro's City Government and the Municipal Secretary of Culture. Other partners include SEBRAE, Brazil's largest supporter of micro and small businesses, the "Culture Points" program from the Ministry of Culture, which intends to support and bring together entities that develop cultural actions throughout the country, as well as The People’s Palace Projects, an independent arts charity that advance the practice and understanding of arts for social justice and is housed in Queen Mary, University of London. Following a period of financial uncertainty, in late 2017, the program secured a three-year partnership with the Ford Foundation to carry out three more cycles.

That same year, for its seventh cycle, Agency invested in an adapted version of the original methodology inspired by the slogan "Every Youth is Rio." The initiative promoted a series of home events and workshops bringing together over 800 young people from various communities to discuss proposals for action in their territories, with a focus on developing leadership and networks for future political participation. In 2019, Agency returned to its original methodology with a new cycle involving 50 young people from various communities in Rio's North and West zones who are guided by former program participants turned mentors. Beyond Rio, under the name Impulso, the methodology was recently expanded to the neighboring state of Espírito Santo, where 100 young people from 3 different favelas in the Serra region are receiving support to develop the creative process that will result in action in a territory that hosts of the highest homicide rates in Brazil.

With investments of over R$ 2,5 million (800,00 USD), since its inception, Agency has mobilized around 2,500 potential participants and directly engaged more than 1,200 young people aged 14-29 from dozens of favelas and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo. Up to 2016, among the 267 original project proposals developed inside the methodology, 93 were funded, 22 were formalized as MEI (individual micro-entrepreneur), and one became its very own NGO. These grassroots initiatives are multifaceted, covering a wide range of issues and populations, from arts and sports initiatives focused on children, to leisure programs to the elderly, and culture, education, and job training actions directed at youth and adults.

The Agency program has also crossed national borders, inspiring the creation of a similar initiative in the cities of London, Manchester, Belfast, and Cardiff in the United Kingdom, promoted since 2013 by the Battersea Arts Center and Manchester's Contact Theatre in collaboration with the People's Palace Projects.[6] In 2018, the project won a National lottery funding of over £870,000 to expand the reach of its activities across the country and raise the number of participants over the next three years (People's Palace Projects, 2018). The methodology was also recently celebrated at the British Parliament, where young protagonists of change had the chance to meet with politicians, present their initiatives, and highlight their importance in tackling social needs in their communities.

2.2. Inspirations for the methodology

Following the introduction of Agency's leading premises and objectives, this section expands on some of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks inspiring the methodology and their approach to youth and social development in favelas. The elements of "territory, devices, and desire" are central features of their work, being introduced separately in the discussion below.

[6] For an introduction to the UK experience with The Agency: Makers of Change, please see: https://www.bac.org.uk/content_category/3381/young_people__learning/the_agency_1525.

Territory

The concept of territory as a source of subjectivities – rather than fixed identities – has been fundamental in the elaboration of the conceptual framework sustaining much of what Agency does. From this perspective, they draw a contrast between the stigmatized representations of peripheries as fixed and uniform spaces associated to marginalization, precariousness and violence, and territories, which are understood as the manifestation of the individual actions and creative potential of the diverse subjects that inhabit those spaces. While the notion of peripheries and slums are often tied to ideas of ghettoness and exclusion, the concept of territory provides a space for the differences, subjectivities, and cultural richness present in each one of these communities to come to light. That is, the territory is a place where a multitude of individuals live and act, thus, it cannot be reduced to single stereotypes of crime and poverty. Most importantly, a territory does not inevitably determine its residents' identity but offers a fertile ground for representations, practices, and actions of all kinds to emerge.

In his conceptualization of the territory as a political and aesthetical category, Agency's founder, Marcus Faustini, was highly influenced by authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, who categorized *Don Quixote* as a territorial romance, and Milton Santos, a Brazilian geographer specialized in urban development in the third world who wrote extensively about territorial interventions incorporating social action and artistic language. In turn, Jailson de Souza Silva and Jorge Barboza – respectively, founder and coordinator of *Favela's Observatory*, one of the most respected Brazilian NGOs advancing public action and the production of knowledge about favelas and the urban phenomenon – helped politicize the term within the context of Rio de Janeiro's peripheries and informal settlements, starting from the recognition of residents as subjects who create and dispute the imaginary about territories and the various ways to act upon them through what they produce (Barboza, 2010).

Rio favelas and peripheries have historically been perceived as culturally and artistically empty spaces in need of receiving "high" knowledge and values brought from the outside by people with little to no understanding of those environments. The main logic behind social actions in these spaces is tied to the idea of giving something to those who have nothing. Much to the contrary, however, cultural and artistic manifestation abound in these communities and grounds for their advancement must be sustained and valued as an expression of residents' identity, creative potential, and ways of living. Considering this, the recognition of popular territories as autonomous spaces home to multiple and powerful subjectivities and actions, allows the Agency program to move beyond (and counter) assitentialist approaches consumed by notions of absolute deprivation. In other words, rupturing with the fatalistic and narrow representations of poor people is essential to comprehending and supporting the contemporary production that characterizes favelas and peripheries.

Drawing from the potentiality, identities, and desires of young people living in these communities – and helping them find a platform to voice their knowledge of the local and act

upon their abilities – Agency seeks to transform Rio territories in political and asthetical arenas. To them, in order to confront city inequalities, it is essential to deepen the narratives originating from popular territories so residents can own their own representations, gain political visibility, and expand their space to engage in dialogue with the state and demand that their rights be respected. The dispute of the city begins with knowledge of the city. That is to say that, once individuals venture out to explore experiences beyond their territories and circulate in other spaces, they begin to comprehend the richness of diversity and to draw near new people and realities, expanding their repertoire and own sensitivity towards different ways of living.

To this end, Agency encourages young participants to frequent new neighborhoods and places in Rio (many, often made seem unapproachable to this particular population) as an experience of citizenship and an opportunity for exchange, comparison, experimentation, and learning. Their objective is to help young people see and live the city to their own benefit and to approach it as a fruitful ground for action and expression, pushing aside anxieties and perceptions of exclusion and inadequacy.

Devices

From the aesthetics of documentary cinematography presented to Marcus Faustini by Cezar Migliorin, professor of cinema studies at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFF), originated a language and way of action that promotes the use of instruments as devices. Placing focus on the relationship between filmmakers and their surrounding world rather than on specific content, devices are tools that encourage creators to go beyond their restricted point of view and allow reality to speak freely through the frames and lenses of films. It provides strategies to combine and process aspects of the social and physical world to deliver a message, expanding new opportunities for action and invention. In documentaries by filmmakers such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Rodrigo Fonseca, and Eduardo Coutinho, for instance, the way reality is represented and the content structure of the work is developed through the author's use of a number of devices – meaning their worldview are not the central piece of the creative process. Notably, in the documentary *The Gleaners and I*, instead of speaking directly about the theme of French agriculture, the film director, Agnès Vargas, concentrates on the figure of the gleaners and, through their actions and subjective experiences, she then allows the world of agriculture to emerge. By the same token, in *Chris Maker's Bestiary*, the universe of the film is brought to light as the author comes across different animals during his travels.

Inspired by this framework, Marcus Faustini then began to approach art as a device, a trigger of actions and inventions which can serve functions beyond the scope of representation. In this sense, art is not only an artistic product but a platform for the creation of an aesthetic environment that generates a sequence of actions and interventions drawing from a person's social history. For example, in his book *Sentimental Guide to the Periphery* (2009), Faustini depicts his life trajectory from the perspective of his memories and experiences in and of the city, using recollection maps and an inventory of objects he came across growing up at the

margins to help describe and voice his emotional memoir. The instruments that constitute the Agency methodology are thus inspired by events and exploits of the program founder's early life. Borrowing aspects of the artistic world to stimulate young people's creative and territorial intervention, Agency's devices (or instruments, as discussed in-depth in section 2.5) are at the heart of its workshops linking training and action.

Rather than pre-defined contents in which youth must be "conscientized" about or actions they should pursue, the starting point of Agency's methodology is the desire of each participant; the program's devices serve mainly as a channel that allows such desires to be articulated and concretized. Fixed curriculums based on moralistic thinking about what favela youth should be or how they should act, the program believes, only reproduce stereotypes about these young people and the communities where they come from. On the other hand, exposing young people to mechanisms of relation to the world and the city – while stimulating them to articulate different opportunity frameworks to their benefit – open doors for increased grounds of expression, helping produce new and unexpected contents. In this way – with the territory no longer being approached as a pre-determined space – the tools from the world of arts and cinema are incorporated into the methodology as an aesthetic practice with a social purpose, triggering political action inside and outside favelas.

Desire

The idea of the "desiring subject" stems from the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who, alongside Félix Guatarri in the book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), developed the concept of desiring-production – a broader appropriation of Nietzsche's conceptualization of the will to power, the main force driving humans – with desire being understood as a productive force rather than an imaginary force driven by lack (Oxford Reference, 2018). In the same strain, desire as the trigger of young people's life projects and intervention in the territory is a core concept of the Agency program. The capacity to reinvent life in defiance of stereotypes imposed upon favela and peripheral communities and to concretize projects that can broaden the imaginary about these territories while creating solution to local problems, are only but a few of the possibilities that the desire can provide. This way, the desire functions as a device for young favela youth to share their social history and to position themselves in the city from a place of protagonism, taking up a different role than what is expected by society. Youth's recognition of their own desire also symbolizes the recognition of themselves as political subjects who project themselves in the city's social and political landscape as leaders and changemakers with important contributions to make steeming from their life experiences, rather than as subordinates with nothing to add.

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Negri's ontological definition of multitudes as a "revolutionary monster" was instrumental in expressing the idea of something hybrid and powerful that works to subvert the established order and redefine existing standards (Negri,

2004). Within the context of Agency, this "monster" is understood as the projects that young people create from an analysis of what already exists in the territory, generating innovative and context-sensitive ways of tackling local challenges. The desire is also a channel to bring young people closer to more complex repertoires. For instance, high levels of school dropout, amongst other factors, reflects the hierarchical teaching and learning structure that dominates our traditional school systems – which, for the most part, are detached from local ways of being and knowing. Moving away from this logic, in seeking to expand the participant's repertoire, Agency filters more complex contents by using language and stimulus that are connected to the interests and desires of young people.

The focus in processes of action, mediation, and inquiry that reject uncritical models of education and stimulate students to exercise their own intelligence in a free and emancipated fashion draws from the philosophy of Jacques Ranciére. Rejecting the notion of a "hierarchy of intellectual capacity," in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation (1991)* the French philosopher argues that all speaking beings possess the same intelligence, thus, emancipation takes place when people act upon- and continue to validate- the basis of the presupposition of equality of intelligence amongst all. The role of the educator, in this sense, is to discretely guide students towards the continuous awareness and appreciation of their own capacities, moving away from the "stultification" of their intellect (Ranciére, 1991). Along these theoretical lines, Agency works to provide a platform for young participants to expand upon their knowledge and skills, to perceive their desire as something possible, and to recognize (and fulfill) their own creative potential.

This kind of incentive is essential in a restricted context where most young people are given no other alternative but to work long hours for low pay – which allows little room for other experiences – or must face the logic that no engagement in productive activities may translate to involvement with crime, which indeed abounds in their communities. Such a scenario refrains youth from experimenting, finding out what they like to do, and building networks to facilitate access to new opportunities. Therefore, the program focus on entrepreneurship functions as a pretext for this kind of discovery to ensue, encouraging youth to explore diverse options and to take charge of their own aspirations and abilities so they see pathways beyond the limitations of the formal market. Crafting proposals for funding competitions, for example, is an avenue for participants to structure and viabilize their ideas, starting from the concrete possibility that their projects can be realized. Drawing inspiration from Richard Sennett's book *Together* (2012) – which maintains that increased co-operation amongst different people is an important driver of society's prosperity – Marcus Faustini combined the notions of entrepreneurship and community co-operation in the Agency methodology as the foundational ground through which to stimulate the favela and peripheral youth to advance projects profitable to them but with an added value also to their territories.

Considering the discussion above, in sum, the methodology advanced by Agency rests on the

following principles:

1. Favelas and peripheries are complex and dynamic territories that must not be approached as single blocks. Each person living in those places deserve access to platforms, tools, and opportunities to express themselves and make their voices heard;
2. To confront and help change the negative characterization of favela youth – discourses which undermine their autonomy, self-esteem, and opportunities for personal and professional growth – a focus must be placed in maximizing their creative potential;
3. To expand favela and peripheral youth's opportunities for learning, invention, and free expression, they must be stimulated to move around the city, frequent new spaces, and engage with different social groups;
4. The favela and peripheral youth must be given the opportunity to live different experiences and express themselves from their individual point of view and realities. Any hierarchical approach or social construction regarding who they are, what they are supposed to do, or who they are supposed to become in life must be rejected;
5. Although Agency's methodology disposes of established instruments and elements, their goal is not to serve as a didactic, but to help unleash participants' potential and desires through practical exercises and artistic language;
6. The favela and peripheral youth must be encouraged to identify and make use of the resources, opportunities, and networks that already exist in their communities to strengthen and realize their own project ideas. At the same time, it is important that they learn to use their abilities and potential to help solve local problems and benefit their communities.
7. Aligned with its entrepreneurial focus, Agency's methodology seeks to help participants expand the organizational, interpersonal, and business skills necessary to formulate and carry out fruitful projects that draw from their social history, interests, and knowledge.
8. Visibility is a right that triggers other rights, such as the right to the city and the right to demand better living standards. The favela and peripheral youth must be given visibility in their capacity as community leaders, agents of social transformation, and creators of projects that can spur innovation in local communities and help reduce inequalities.

2.3. Target population

As for its target population, Agency is not a platform working solely with extraordinary young

people. Much to the contrary, when mobilizing and selecting participants to join the program, it strives to form balanced cohorts representing the diversity unique to peripheral territories while promoting an active engagement between different youth groups in the city. To Agency, to appreciate the differences young people display in their social and cultural background, educational and work trajectories, religious affiliation, sexual preference, tastes, viewpoints, conduct, and behavior, is a way to rupture with the idea that favelas and peripheries are single blocks, giving voice to the plurality of individualities that exist within these spaces. Accordingly, the profile of program participants is as diverse as the project ideas they come up with. From the fervent evangelical to the frequent partygoer, the university student to the high school dropout, and the young apprentice to the street vendor, the goal is to create a space for young people to exchange knowledge and celebrate their similarities, but also learn how to respect their differences.

Their mobilization strategy is a crucial step in guaranteeing this diversity and inclusiveness. In addition to taking the applications of youth who contact program staff responding to one of their many marketing tools (flyers, posters, online ads, etc.), the mobilization involves the active recruitment of young people in the territory who are not likely to spontaneously apply for the program, including the most socioeconomically vulnerable, those out of school and out of work, and youth who do not already participate in a social project. Following a mapping of the places where these young people normally gather in the community and the areas where a large concentration of them most likely reside (information that is collected through conversations with local residents), Agency staff approach them at their homes or on the street, introducing the program to them, their parents and/or other family members and guardians, and answering any questions they may have.

When the program was first established in 2011, there was a particular focus on reaching young people residing in a group of favelas impacted by the Pacification security policy – an opening that, at that time, facilitated the program's ability to operate effectively despite the high levels of criminal violence that historically plunged these communities into segregation. However, from the 2016 cycle onwards, the program shifted its focus to communities of Santa Cruz in Rio's West zone where some of the neighborhoods with the lowest Human Development Index of the city are located and where urban violence is particularly prominent. Mainly a low-income residential area, Santa Cruz is located 70km from Rio's city center, where most job opportunities are available. This geographical isolation has resulted in high unemployment rates, a situation exacerbated by the lack of social and economic policies and the strong influence of drug factions and militias who impose their own rule of law upon residents.

Within this context, young residents of communities in Santa Cruz have very little access to platforms for personal development and self-realization. Not only can it be physically difficult to circulate the city (high bus fares, for example, represent a great impediment to the mobility of poor people), but attempting to access new opportunity structures in terms of strategic

networks, cultural, recreational and educational options outside one's community can feel intimidating and even alienating to young people with little or no prior exposure to such environments. As the analysis of participant characteristics will show, even young residents of favelas located in central areas of the city have been isolated from places considered hubs for cultural exposure such as libraries and museums.

In this way, recognizing the plight of young people, the complexities of their everyday lives, and the dynamics of poor urban living, Agency creates a beneficiary profile that is relevant to the conditions and needs of the territories they seek to impact. Considering, for instance, that a large portion of young people living in favelas and peripheries work in the informal market, Agency works to build upon their hardworking spirit and capacity to come up with creative responses to unemployment, helping unleash young people's potential and fueling entrepreneurship opportunities based on what they have already done or on what they know and have experienced as part of their everyday lives.

In sum, while the program's main target population consists of young people aged 14-29 residents of favelas or peripheries of Rio de Janeiro (with specific communities varying every cycle), they strive to guarantee the inclusiveness of black people, women, LGBTs, and practitioners of different religions in the selection process. Amongst this group, as summarized below, precedence is given to youth in a situation of social vulnerability and violence, then, the selection criteria prioritize young people who already demonstrate an entrepreneurial profile.

Socio-economic conditions (primary):

- Residents of the community's poorest areas and recipients of Bolsa Família;[7]
- Have been or are currently exposed to direct violence;
- Have been or are currently involved in drug trafficking or other criminal activities;
- Have a relative who has been or is currently involved in drug trafficking or other criminal activities;
- Are at risk for school dropout;
- Are neither in school nor in employment or work in the informal sector;
- Reside in overcrowded households with a low number of working adults;
- Have children of their own.

Entrepreneurial conditions (secondary):

- Work or have worked on their own, as street vendors or service provider, for example;
- Have mainly depended on informal and seasonal jobs to make a living;
- Are or have been involved in a family business,
- Possess abilities in a particular area (arts, gastronomy, handicraft, technology, etc.);
- Would like to obtain financial and living independence;

[7] The internationally acclaimed conditional cash transfer program consolidated under Lula da Silva's presidency (2003-2011) distribute funds to families in poverty or extreme poverty provided they meet the necessary conditions. To qualify, the monthly income for each person in the household cannot exceed R$140,00 or roughly $45.

- Have long-term goals and would like to achieve them;
- Have the desire to help improve their community;
- Project themselves and their interventions as part of future projects for community development;
- They pursue a cause that can serve as the foundations for the creation of a social project (environmental, cultural, LGBT, health, educational issues, etc.).

2.4. Coordination and mentoring team

Agency's team of coordinators and mentors are responsible for guiding participants through the methodology, providing them with tools and practical knowledge useful for the planning and production of their projects – with applicability also to their everyday lives. In addition to giving them incentives and helping expand their repertoire, Agency believes that it is of utmost importance that educators motivate the favela youth to trust their abilities and ideas. This encouragement must be continuous and fairly distributed amongst all participant youth. Also, it is fundamental that young people have confidence in the capacity of Agency's team and the program methodology to support them in their development process. This requires the building of a mentor-mentee relationship that is characterized by attention and affection, but also clarity and objectivity. That is, while mentors must demonstrate that they are passionate about participant's ideas and genuinely interested in their growth, the interaction needs to evolve beyond the personal level if productive results are also to ensue.

Strategic and well-targeted incentives not only help provide a clear and meaningful contribution to the development of the project, but they also serve as a trust-building mechanism that allows young people to recognize the attention and commitment that educators are directing towards them and their success in the program. In practice, such relationship implies individualized support and awareness of each participant's limitations and capabilities, with any kind of orientation and/or stimulus being carefully crafted to better reflect and meet particular needs. Aligned with Agency's commitment to serve as a platform for the co-creation of ideas and innovative solutions to local challenges, a central mentoring approach is that educators give young participants the freedom and autonomy to develop their work and think on their own, but, concurrently, intervening whenever necessary, proposing alternatives, and bringing in mediation tools that can support them in making more thoughtful decisions. The idea is to provide balance and stimulus that guarantee the continuity of reflexive, critical, and interrogative activities throughout the creative process.

Most young professionals working at Agency are themselves residents of Rio favelas and peripheries and, by way of experience, have in-depth knowledge of participants' culture, struggles, and realities – which allows them to establish a connection with these young people with more ease. This diverse staff group performs various functions to ensure that the methodology unfolds as planned. The **coordinating team**, for example, is responsible for

overseeing all program activities, administering its related logistics, helping direct training workshops, and supervising other employees. **Local producers** – professionals working at the local level in the various communities where Agency is present and who know those spaces intimately – are the link between the program and the youth they work with, helping preserve the methodology individualized and context-sensitive nature. When it comes to the program's pedagogical activities, the bulk of them are carried out by a team of facilitators and interns.

Facilitators – most of whom possess an artistic background – coordinate the workshops, introduce the methodological tools, and guarantee that a stimulating and productive environment is built. These positions are often filled by more senior staff, as they require an in-depth knowledge of the methodology and all its ins and outs. Facilitators must be ready to adapt to the conditions of every workshop meeting while staying true to the main objectives of the instruments being presented. At the same time, they must refrain from simply applying the methodology with no regards to the needs and demands of each group and participant. In other words, the authentic application of every "didactic" element and instrument must be balanced with playful dynamics and artistic activities. This is based on the understanding that the capacity to captivate and hold participants' interest is as important as working to make certain they grasp the coherence and effectiveness of the methodology.

Another central aspect of the role of facilitators is to ensure that Agency's interns (who act as their assistants during the workshops) are adequately supporting participants and producing useful knowledge alongside them. He/she needs to come up with strategies to keep interns and participants engaged, guiding and orchestrating stimulus based on the profile of each of them, and customizing strategies to excite and involve even the most disengaged youth. In all, while facilitators introduce the instruments, oversee the intern-participant relationship, and keep track of the overall progress and setbacks of each group, interns focus on the specific evolution and needs of each individual project and participant. **Interns** are university students – mainly in the field of social sciences and coming from poor backgrounds – who help young people use the methodological instruments introduced and access the necessary techniques to successfully develop their projects throughout the creative process.

These young college-goers represent an important support system for participants, answering any questions they may have, helping them pursue partnerships, and providing orientation and technical assistance in all phases of project creation, from research to planning and execution. Interns are expected to be familiar with the theme of the projects they guide and to bring in references that can spark up discussions and help participants develop their idea, such as real-life accounts, case studies, videos, news stories, articles, and websites – stimulating youth to do the same on their own and triggering their curiosity. For example, the intern can share a story of local organizations or individuals who have faced and solved a project creation-related problem (**dilemma** exercise), introduce an existing initiative that is similar to the group's project idea so as to strengthen and expand proposed courses of action (**mirror** exercise), or share a

visual tool that can stimulate participants to look more comprehensively and critically at a particular issue relevant to their work (**get to know** exercise).

Having presented the team behind Agency's work and their role in the educational process, let us now unpack the official instruments and elements used in the program along with their main objectives.


"Isso de quer
ser
AGÊNCIA
a potência vai virar poder!
TODO

2.5. Educational instruments and activities

As noted earlier, Agency's methodology primarily revolves around the stimulus cycle, a two-month-long program through which participants actively engage with methods and tools that supports them in turning their ideas into concrete and feasible social action projects. This creative process requires young people to appreciate and make use of their knowledge, abilities, and life experiences while assessing local conditions, resources and needs to guide their entrepreneurial aspirations. Each phase of the stimulus cycle is intended to capture and hold participants' interest by inviting them to tap into their imaginary and expand their social repertoire through activities that bring them closer to their everyday lives and individual desires. Ultimately, the methodology attempts to create an educational space that differs from traditional school classrooms and that stimulates participants to explore possibilities beyond their immediate lives. That is, the focus is placed on experimentation and creation, rather than in the transmission of knowledge and information. In a context where the experiences of favela youth are generally controlled and repressed, the stimulus cycle seeks to open new fields of perception and expression, allowing participants to take lead and create their own pedagogical contents relevant to their projects and lifeworld.

Each concept, methodological instrument, and element is introduced gradually, and educators are not only expected to respect the cognitive and emotional abilities of young people but to also consciously refrain from creating a position of hierarchy. Rather, they build a relationship of trust with participants based on affection and co-production of knowledge, which serves as encouragement and guidance so they can find ways to develop their ideas within the opportunities and limitations of their surroundings. To Agency, in order to help transform untapped and raw potential into effective realization capacity, it is essential that educators relate to young people, believe in them, and commit themselves to understand the different social and emotional profile of participants. This is also a way for educators to find the best strategy to approach each youth individually. Over the course of the stimulus cycle – for the methodology to reach its potential – educators must demonstrate enthusiasm for the ideas generated by young people, feeding them with the appropriate stimulus, repeating the exercises whenever necessary, reinforcing the use of the instruments, and, above all, keeping an open dialogue with them.

The stimulus cycle is comprised of eight instruments (described below in detail) introduced during weekly meetings on Saturdays. The main goal of these workshops is to help participants structure their projects with a basis on practical elements drawn from the methodology as a preliminary form of reasoning and expression. As the creative process deepens, participants are encouraged to exercise their analytical and critical thinking skills – a crucial step in sparking new and unexpected ideas that cannot be captured by predetermined teaching and learning frameworks. In sum, while it strives to open a space that allows for free expression and co-production of knowledge, Agency's methodology is guided by specific learning goals that must

be clear to both participants and educators. Each exercise introduced through the instruments, although interactive and playful in a way, play a specific function in the creative process. Ensuring that participants not only understand the function and importance of those exercises but that they also engage in a self-reflection about their relevance to their projects, is a way to increase their trust in the methodology as a serious avenue to promote their social action initiatives.

At the end of the stimulus cycle, participants must be able to demonstrate to the external committee how they have used each instrument in the development of their ideas and the results produced. Agency acknowledges that not every participant will retain the educational content the same way, but still, all efforts should be directed towards exposing youth to as many project creation tools as possible so as to improve their chances of advancing their actions beyond the scope of the program. Making use of interactive activities and aspects of dramaturgy, the educators direct the workshops around four main acts: 1) a playful introduction, a warm-up game that helps spark a discussion of concepts related to the instrument that will be presented that day; 2) the concept display, a concrete example of how the instrument has been applied in real life; 3) the experimentation and product presentation, an initial application of the instrument by youth in light of their project idea and the presentation of results to the rest of the group; and finally 4) the ending exercise, a self-reflection of the activities youth took part in that day, their purpose, and what they learned from it. It is important to note that every meeting during the stimulus cycle follows the sequence of these four acts for the purpose of establishing a method that is clear to both educators and students and that can maximize learning objectives.

The **compass**, the very first instrument introduced in the methodology, is a visualization of young peoples' ideas and it is used to guide each one of them in the program. Participants are given creative material to work with (paper, colored pencils, crayons, beads, etc.) and are asked to present their ideas as directions in a compass, which includes: to the north, a description of the project idea, as raw as it may be; to the south, a description of what motivated the idea, how that connects to their lived experiences, and what resources and abilities are needed to put them into practice; to the east, the forms of expression that will be used to concretize the idea; and finally, to the west, the territory and populations that will be impacted. The idea – or "desire," as Agency likes to put it – is now on its way to becoming reality. As a reminder of their personal connection to it and the meaning that it holds, youth carry their compasses close throughout their entire time at Agency.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Capacity to imagine and visualize the desire;
- Approach the desire as the starting point for the development of an idea;
- Recognize oneself as the protagonist of an idea based on one's own social history, interests, and trajectory;

- Recognize limits and opportunities to the fulfillment of the desire by considering one's own abilities and the community context;
- Speak in public and present one's own idea.

The **alphabet** instrument invites young people to construct their own concepts and actively engage with their future projects using elements of their territories and lifeworld. It involves the activity of writing down words in a piece of paper related to their project ideas from A to Z. Through each word, they describe the knowledge, external references, and experiences that have inspired their entrepreneurial aspirations and that may be used further to advance them, including different people, objects, places, affective relations, and individual motivations. The goal of the alphabet exercise is to help young people systematize their thoughts and strengthen their imaginary while placing focus on the way they make use of their territory and lived experiences to talk about themselves and express their understanding of the world.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Use elements of one's external reality, identity, and history to create and express something;
- Make decisions and motivate others to do the same;
- Engage in storytelling and create an aesthetic construction around one's idea and action in the territory, drawing from their values and meanings;
- Recognize oneself as the bearer of memories which can inspire narratives and projects;
- Project the future realization of the project identifying all elements needed to put it into action;
- Organize ideas and complete tasks by finding one element for each letter of the alphabet;
- Speak in public and present one's own idea.

During the **ideas fair** program participants present their initial project ideas to others with the end goal of creating groups connecting members who present similar interests and that would be willing to work together in the development of one single project. The name "fair" says it all; it is a dynamic exercise of public negotiation that allows youth to exchange ideas and intervene freely in the conversation, which requires them to visualize and present the desire that is driving their entrepreneurial ambitions. This specific instrument gives participants the chance to engage with expressing themselves effectively and convincingly in order to sell their ideas, but it also serves the purpose of showing them the importance of compromising and letting go of individual preferences for the "greater good" of the projects. The goal is to help form strong groups that will maximize the potential for realization while bringing young people together in dialogue.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Identify the main elements of the idea;
- Capacity to persuade, express thoughts, and sell the project idea to others;
- Establish working groups to work collaboratively in the development of the idea;
- Understand the importance of knowledge sharing and co-creation in strengthening the idea and its realization possibilities;

- Commitment to the well-functioning of the group.

The **map** instrument encourages participants to become more connected to their communities, discovering aspects of it they did not know about and exploring resources they can tap into - which increases their interest and capacity to recognize the potency present in those spaces. In what relates to project creation, specifically, the map entails an understanding of the population the projects seek to benefit, including information on profile, needs, and expectations. This analysis is an important step in identifying the places and approaches that can give a strong flow to the project. For example, if a group wants to set up a soccer event for children in the community they need to survey not only physical spaces available but also where to find the highest concentration of young people who are not engaged in sports, so as to maximize the project's reach and impact. In practical terms, each group writes down a list of at least 10 characteristics that describe their target population in as much detail as they can.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Capacity to articulate the idea in a clear and convincing way, drawing from what already exists in the territory;
- Approach the territory from its opportunities and potency;
- Identify the project's target population, which necessities will be addressed, and what locations will be prioritized;
- Identify potential obstacles to the development of the project and the areas that need further clarification and focus;
- With basis on these given proposals, strive to find solutions to these limitations and structure the project in a strategic way.

Aligned with the map exercise, the **inventory** instrument invites participants to survey their territories in search of elements that can be useful to the development of their ideas. It entails observing, collecting and organizing information and experiences that already exist inside their communities and that are relevant to their project of choice. As an artistic tool that seeks to boost the creative process, the inventory is expressed by young people in the form of drawings, collages, pictures, objects, and testimonials. Within the Agency methodology, youth make use of this instrument to list project needs as well as the partnerships they can potentially establish - which gives them the chance to visualize opportunities for the realization of their ideas that are close to them rather than relying on external networks. More specifically, they lay out 1) the partnership options they already have access to within their immediate groups of friends and family, 2) a list of partners they see as important but have yet to establish contact with, and 3) the abilities (of organization, administration, and communication, for instance) they believe their group members need in order to successfully advance the project. One of the important aspects of the inventory is that it places value in the various elements of everyday life these young people are exposed to in their communities and the opportunities for growth it may offer them – which is a step towards breaking with the denial that some favela dwellers sustain in relation to their own territory.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Explore different ways to use elements from the inventory to create a project plan;
- Capacity to articulate the idea in a clear and convincing way, drawing from what already exists in the territory;
- Identify project needs and ways to meet them;
- Identify potential partners inside the territory with an eye towards local potential;
- Identify references and inspirations in project creation from the territory which have been successful;
- Explore ways to use the inventory instrument in everyday life and beyond Agency.

The **challenge** instrument marks the rupture of the stimulus cycle and the recapitulation of all instruments introduced up until this point. The aim is to analyze young people's understandings of the concepts they have been engaging with, as well as their ability to present their projects in public using clear and convincing language. In this simulation examination, groups have five minutes to present their ideas to other participants and convey three specific points: 1) the project's main proposed actions, 2) the project rationale, with special attention given to the desires that inspired the idea and the impact it hopes to make in the territory, 3) the functions each member of the team will take on and how that connects to the abilities they already possess or might need. One of the most important aspects of the challenge instrument is that it engages all participants collectively. That is, those who are presenting must work through dominating key elements of their projects, as for the youth in the audience, the very fact of listening to someone else's ideas and asking questions stimulates an evaluation of their own strategies for social action.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Synthesize the project's main elements in a five-minute presentation;
- Capacity to express oneself in public clearly, whether presenting or giving feedback;
- Identify obstacles and limitations in other group's projects while offering potential solutions;
- Capacity to identify similarities with other projects and exchange knowledge;
- Assume a position of protagonism in the evaluation process and advancement of one's own project as well as that of other participant groups.

The **avatar**, possibly the most popular instrument in the Agency methodology, helps young people find their place and role inside their projects. The concept is an attempt to reflect the different behaviors people assume in everyday situations and emphasize the need for flexibility when working with others. Through an activity that combines elements of theatre, storytelling, and a discussion of representative images, participants identify themselves within six different types of avatars. They are as follows: 1) the pioneer, is intuitive and an opportunity taker; this person drives the group forward even though he/she may not fully dominate the project repertoire and thematic just yet; 2) the executor, is strategic and goal-oriented, he/she understands what kind of tools and abilities are needed in order for the project to succeed and

either possess some of them or knows where to find them; 3) the collaborator, is a team-player who contributes to the execution of different tasks; 4) the happy one, brings positivity and good energy to the group; he/she is good at conflict mediation and help alleviate tensions that may arise; 5) the inquirer, is the person who constantly asks questions and makes suggestions, stimulating other group members to improve the overall project action plan; and finally, 6) the neutral, is the person who assumes whatever role is needed given the particular conditions of the project. Although these categories are pre-determined, they are not fixed, meaning that participants can take on different avatars throughout the various program phases, guaranteeing their freedom to change their minds and grow along with their projects. Essentially the avatar is a strategy to organize and distribute tasks within groups, with each member understanding his/her contribution and responsibilities as well as the benefit that different functions and abilities bring to the table. Furthermore, it reminds young people that particular situations, spaces, social groups, and networks will require them to carry themselves in a certain way. For example, amongst friends it is acceptable to talk and laugh out loud, however, at a job interview, it is necessary to adopt a less playful posture.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Understand the different qualities needed to successfully relate with different groups of people in the city and to approach different situations;
- Recognize the flexibility in navigating through these different approaches and behaviors, as they are context-specific and based on momentary demands;
- Recognize that the strength of a group and the effectiveness of its actions depend on the different profiles and abilities of each participant and the functions they perform;
- Learn to collaborate and engage with other group members, understanding the need to let go of personal frustrations and preferences – and to adopt whatever avatar is relevant to the situation – so the group can be socially productive;
- Evaluate one's own competencies and abilities, as well as that of other group members, to identify how they can contribute to the development of the project;
- Share functions inside the group without creating a hierarchy, as each member possesses qualities and abilities equally necessary for the project to work;
- Understand the peculiarities of each avatar proposed by Agency, the behaviors they must assume in different situations, and their purpose;
- Identify which abilities and qualities members of the group must enhance to guarantee the survival and functioning of the group, associating its needs with the characteristics of each avatar;
- Capacity to question, make decisions, and explain one's own choices in relation to the avatar.

One day in the life of my project entails an actual preview of the project in action. It symbolizes a sort of "inauguration day" that helps bring credibility and confidence to the groups. The eight-hour event must have well-defined beginning, middle, and end activities that clearly transmit the overall message and values of the project. For each planned hour of the event, the groups must prepare a list detailing what they will be doing, what results they expect to get, and who

will be responsible for what. An important objective of this particular instrument is to directly engage youth groups with their target audiences on the ground and to get them thinking about strategies to keep the public involved and interested on what they have to offer - which may be shaped as part of a collective process with the community itself.

Abilities and actions promoted:

- Experiment with setting up a day-long event and strategize all its phases: pre-production, execution, climax, and finalization;
- Capacity to organize ideas and visualize their realization on the ground;
- Distribute tasks amongst group members with basis on the abilities and avatars of each one;
- Capacity to meet the practical needs of organizing and holding an event;
- Explore strategies to mobilize the project's target audience and keep them engaged.

Following these eight instruments is a series of elements and activities meant to prepare participants to present their projects in front of a jury as part of the funding competition and to effectively implement them in the territory if awarded the funding. We will now introduce them briefly. The **aesthetics of the presentation** exercise help groups create and rehearse their presentation to the examination board. In addition to preparing a talk and power point slides, groups must write a report elaborating on their projects incorporating contents from the different instruments (mobilization strategies, the role of each group member, schedule and budget, continuity strategies, etc.). The **event**, which takes place in Rio every year, provides a space for Agency youth from different communities to get to know each other, also serving as a platform to connect participants with individuals, institutions, and organizations of interest from Brazil and abroad.

The **examination board** follows the event and, for many, it represents the most crucial step in the methodology, after which the desire can truly become a reality. The board in each territory is constituted by two or three suitable members (cultural producers, policy-makers, entrepreneurs, state agents, activists, journalists, etc.) who not only understand how the proposed projects may benefit the city but are also able to recognize their significance to participants. Once the presentations are concluded, the board makes its decision on what groups will be awarded the R$10,000 funding and move on to the next program phase. The groups who are unable to secure funding receive recommendations on how to concretize their ideas otherwise and may also develop a "plan B" with the support of members of the external committee. As noted, in total, 93 original proposals have been funded by Agency through the years, which includes projects selected by the examination board as well as additional initiatives the program may decide to support anyways based on their relevance and potential for territorial impact.

The last elements of the methodology incorporate strategies for contact expansion and project execution. Agency help participants establish important **networks** with people of interest inside their territories as well as in the city, who can offer them advice and assistance in many fronts,

from professional and educational stimulus to emotional support and project-related articulations. Having in mind the necessities of each young person who goes through Agency and each project designed, the coordination team creates an exclusive map of opportunities to participant groups (including those who did not pass the examination board) which includes at least three networks pertinent to the project and three contacts connected to the particular desires of group members.

Finally, it is in the **pre-incubator** phase (the step before the execution stage) that participants build an overall action strategy for the project, including a detailed schedule, budget, business plan, and visual identity. Once all components have been approved by Agency's coordination team, the groups are ready to receive the funding and officially start their projects, which is closely monitored and supervised to ensure positive outcomes. During this stage, there is also an important element introduced that involves the educational and professional development of participants as well as strategies for project sustainability beyond Agency. It is important to note that although most participants conclude their official program stay after the examination board, they may continue to benefit from the Agency platform and network long after the cycle is over. As part of their commitment to providing a more permanent support system for the hundreds of young people they engage with, Agency keeps former participants informed about job and educational opportunities, events, and contacts of interest that can help them move forward with any project or goal they may have.

With a more in-depth understanding of how Agency's educational methodology is structured and what kinds of abilities, actions, and outcomes its various instruments and elements seek to promote, we will now introduce the profile of the young people who take part in the program and explore their lifeworld in the context of Rio de Janeiro favelas and peripheries.

Section 3: The Profile of Participant Youth

3.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

Practicing the value of inclusiveness it preaches in terms of democratizing platforms for youth development in peripheral areas, Agency brings together young people from over 32 different communities spread throughout Rio's North, Central, and West Zones. Youth residing in different communities of Santa Cruz have a larger representation in the program (38%), followed by Batan/Fumacê and City of God with 12% and 10% of participants, respectively. Favelas displaying more violent and complex environments, such as Rocinha and Complexo do Alemão, are also represented in the program, but at a lower scale (less than 5%). Although the age range required for participation is 15-29, aligned with Agency's goal to target young favela residents, 76% of beneficiary youth benefited are 21 or less (medium age is 19), with the age group with most representation being 14-16-year-olds (32%) followed by 16-18-year-olds (27%).

The program displays a participant gender balance slightly skewed towards women (59% female against 41% males) and the greatest majority of participants are either black or mixed-race, with only 12% classifying themselves as white. As for religious practices, they show up quite prominently amongst this population. Notably, 58% of participant youth reported that they attend church at least once a week (18% affirmed they go to church every day) and only 17% rarely or never go to mass or religious meetings. Evangelicals are the most representative group (40%), followed by those who are not religious but believe in God (33%) and Catholics (16%). Despite the large proportion of blacks and pardos amongst participants (roughly 85%), only 5% indicated to follow religions of African roots, such as Umbanda and Candomblé – which have historically been on the receiving end of religious intolerance.

Table 1. Percentage of participants per community:

Community	%
Santa Cruz (João XXIII, Cezarão, Guandú, Veridiana, etc.)	38%
Batan/Fumacê	12%
Cidade de Deus	10%
Pavuna	9%
Rocinha	4%
Other	27%

Table 2. Participants' age range:

Age groups	%
14-16	32%
16-18	27%
19-21	17%
22-29	22%
30 and older	2%

Table 3. Participants' sex:

Male	Female
59%	41%

Table 4. Participants' reported race or color:

Race or color	%
Black	47%
Pardo (mixed race)	38%
White	12%
Yellow	2%
Other	1%

Table 5. Participant's religion:

Religion	%
Catholic	16%
Evangelical	40%
No religion, but believe in God	33%
No religion and do not believe in God	2%
Umbanda/Candomblé	5%
Other	4%

Table 6. Church attendance frequency:

Attendance frequency	%
Daily	18%
At least once a week	40%
At least once a month	13%
Once every six months or once a year	12%
Rarely or never	17%

With poverty being rampant in these communities, it is no surprise that at least 1/3 of Agency youth and their families face serious economic problems. As a proxy, 36% of participants live in households benefiting from *Bolsa Família* – Brazil's internationally acclaimed cash transfer program that distributes funds to families in poverty or extreme poverty provided they meet the necessary requirements.[8] Although living in low-income communities, access to a variety of domestic amenities and personal items is widespread. Close to all participants live in homes where there is a color TV, stove, and refrigerator (97%, 97% and 96%, respectively) and 74% own a smartphone – which helps explain their strong presence in social media platforms such as Facebook (96%) and Instagram (86%). Still, more expensive electronics such as air

[8] To quality for Bolsa Familia – a fund which is given every month to the female head of the family – the monthly income for each person in the household cannot exceed R$140,00 (roughly $45) and recipients must meet several requirements in education and health, including guaranteeing children's enrollment and attendance in school and keeping up with immunization records.

conditioning and notebooks remain luxury items (43% and 22% reported having it, respectively).

As for housing conditions, 19% of participants live in homes with one single room that serves as a bedroom and 40% share the household with five or more people (the mean of persons per room is 2.32). A reflection of the insufficiency of affordable housing programs available to match the demand in these mostly informal settlements, only 7% of Agency youth live in a family home that was secured through government housing support. Finally, given their young age, most participants are single (91%) and 75% live with their parents or other relatives (out of whom 26% live with their mothers), with only 5% being married and the same share living alone or with friends. In addition to roughly 15% of them having children (out of whom, 56% had their first child at the age of 18 or younger), 16% of these young people are financially responsible for someone, who, in half the cases, is not their immediate dependent (partner and children) but either their own parent and/or sibling.

Table 7. Percentage of participants who live in homes containing the following amenities:

Amenities	%
Color TV	97%
Stove	97%
Refrigerator	96%
Washing machine	86%
Electric shower	75%
Cable TV	66%
Microwave	65%
Home computer w/ the internet	63%
Air conditioner	43%

Table 8. Participants' living situation:

Living situation	%
Live with both parents	40%
Live with mother, only	26%
Live with father, only	3%
Live with other relatives or partner	20%
Live with grandparents	6%
Live alone or with friends	5%

Table 9. Percentage of participants who own the following personal items:

Personal items	%
Smartphone	74%
Regular cell phone	22%
Notebook	25%
A car	8%
A motorcycle	3%

Table 10. Social media presence:

Social media platforms	%
Facebook	96%
WhatsApp	86%
Instagram	59%
Twitter	43%
LinkedIn	5%

3.2. Education and employment

Alike most low-income students in the country,[9] a significant proportion of Agency participants studied most of their lives in public schools, which tend to perform low and be underfunded. Seeing that, many have experienced problems endemic to the Brazilian public educational system which, amongst other factors, can be associated with poor school infrastructure and environment. For instance, only one-quarter study (studied) in schools promoting sports and leisure events regularly and roughly 20% do (did) not consider their school to be a safe and happy place. In addition, 63% reported that kids in their school assault (assaulted) one another either physically or verbally sometimes or frequently – an everyday challenge that particularly students from marginalized communities are no stranger to. Notwithstanding, the overall perception of Agency youth with respect to their experiences in school is rather positive with 68% indicating they like (liked) their school and get (got) good grades and 67% agreeing they receive (received) support from teachers on a regular basis.

The school progress scenario is, however, most challenging. Given their young age, while it is to be expected that a large share of Agency participants is still in school (indeed, 73% are students), they struggle to transition across grade levels in a timely manner. Data on their current educational level point to a major distortion in the age-per-grade level progress of participants, particularly at the primary level. Out of the 21% share of participants who have not yet completed primary education, as much as 92% are older than 14, the appropriate age for completing this school level in Brazil (in fact, 13% of them are old enough to have finished high school). At the secondary level, the scenario is still worrisome, although it shifts positively. Amongst the 38% of Agency youth who are in high school almost half are still within the official graduation age of 17.

As for participants who are not currently studying, only 29% amongst them have a high school diploma or higher – meaning that, for many, completing secondary education is challenging. This scenario illuminates the persistence of the dropout phenomenon amongst this particular population – which is not exclusive of the favela youth.[10] About 25% of Agency participants have dropped out of school at least once in their lives, 42% at some point during primary education and 56% during high school. Amongst the main reasons are financial pressures, which include leaving school to work or help the family (35%), followed by the birth of a child (24%), and formal expulsion (8%). Despite clear barriers in moving up the educational pipeline, these young people have managed to make important generational improvements. For example, while the highest level of education achieved by the greatest share of Agency participants is incomplete secondary education (38%), in the case of their parents, incomplete primary education comes first (31% and 25% for mothers and fathers, respectively). Agency

[9] 77,5% of all students in primary and secondary education in Brazil are enrolled in public schools (OECD, 2010).

[10] Out of the almost 2,5 million children and youth out of school in Brazil today, over 1,5 million (or 62%) are between the ages of 15 and 17 (Todos Pela Educação, 2017).

youth are also less likely than their parents to have skipped formal schooling with 1% having never attended school compared to 5% amongst mothers and 8% fathers.

Nevertheless, at the university level, the change has been minor with only a one percent difference between the highest post-secondary educational level achieved by youth in comparison to their mothers (compared to fathers, the difference is 3%). This result supports evidence that favela youth (and the population in favelas, in general) still face monumental challenges in reaching this particular educational milestone.[11] Amongst the main reasons why Agency participants who have completed secondary education are not yet enrolled in college, 23% indicated they still have to take the entrance exams for both public and private universities, 21% lack the financial means to pay for a private university, and 12% have not managed to get into a public university or fear they never will.[12] However, this slim opportunity scenario does not seem to have subdued the college hopes of many of these young people. When asked whether they have the intention of attending university in the future, 90% amongst a group of 120 Agency youth replied positively and all of them named the precise major they would like to pursue.

Table 11. Highest level of education achieved by respondents and their parents:

Educational level	% respondent	% respondent's mother	% respondent's father
No formal schooling	1%	5%	8%
Incomplete primary education	20%	31%	25%
Primary education	7%	7%	8%
Incomplete secondary education	38%	13%	9%
High school diploma	25%	26%	24%
Some university	7%	4%	3%
University diploma or higher	3%	6%	4%
Unknown	-	7%	19%

Concerning their world of work, the informal and autonomous sectors are the main sources of employment for Agency participants (39%) – a rate that aligns with national figures (in 2012, the ILO estimated that 38% of young people aged 15-29 in Brazil worked informally) (ILO, 2012). In fact, the diverse jobs these young people perform in the informal economy illustrate how

[11] In 2010, it was estimated that only 1,6% of favela residents in Brazil had a university diploma, while for the remainder of the population that number was roughly 15% (IBGE, 2010).

[12] A common feature of the higher education scenario in Brazil, students graduating from private schools are largely more prepared to take the required entrance examinations to one of the prestigious and highly competitive public universities in the country, while public high school graduates struggle to make the cut and must rely on private for-profit colleges.

resourceful and resilient they are in finding creative ways to make a living and resist employment pressures (see table 14 for examples of informal work). Still, almost half of Agency youth are jobless and only 13% have a formal occupation. In line with this problematic scenario, 47% of these young people have no income at all and, amongst those who do, 60% make one minimum salary (around $245) or less per month.

Table 12. Participant's employment status:

Form of employment	%
Formal employment	14%
Irregular informal employment	19%
Regular informal employment	12%
Self-employed/business owner	8%
Unemployed looking for work	36%
Unemployed not looking for work	8%

Table 13. Participant's monthly income per minimum salary (approximately $245):

Number of minimum salaries	%
No income	47%
One or less	32%
Between one and two	17%
Between two and three	4%
Four or more	<1%

Table 14. Informal employment snapshot. Examples of informal and seasonal work performed by Agency youth:

Examples of informal and seasonal work performed by Agency youth		
Event producer	Janitor	Street performer (living statue)
Zumba teacher	Bird Hunter	Scrap yard assitant
Food seller at the beach	Cafeteria attendant	Cigarette and candy seller at funk parties
Logging worker	Cook	Manicure and pedicure
Nanny	Car wash staff	Food delivery boy
Hairdresser	Door-to-door clothing seller	Tattoo designer
Club bartender	Food seller in school	Mason helper
Grocery store cashier	Photographer	Musician
Food delivery boy	Party waiter	Bakery manager

Exploring Agency participant's perceptions about the labor market can help us make out some of the difficulties that young favela and peripheral populations experience when trying to find a job and why they often rely on the informal sectors for an income. When asked to share their views in relation to access to employment opportunities, 75% of Agency youth agree that it is

hard to find a job with no experience and 62% think that there are few work opportunities inside the favela. In addition, 32% believe they do not have the required qualifications for most jobs available in the city. To some, racial and social standing also play a role in their employment outcomes: 19% and 12% of survey respondents agree that, when trying to find a job, they suffer discrimination due to their skin color and condition as a favela resident, respectively (if "neither agree nor disagree" answers are accounted for, these figures go up to 36% and 34%). Such marginalization sentiment is, naturally, not shared by all participants with the same intensity. For example, the percentage of black youths who feel discriminated in the job market is three times as high as that of white youths (31% against 11%), and while half of black respondents disagree that this kind of discrimination takes place, a much larger share of whites (86%) hold that opinion.

3.3. Exposure to violence

Coupled with limited educational and work opportunities, vulnerabilities growing up in favelas are rampant. Similar to the experiences of millions of Latin Americans whose urban realities are negatively shaped by the severe effects of crime and insecurity, Agency participants are no strange to chronic community violence. Given that favelas have historically found themselves at the receiving end of drug-related and state-led violence, exposure to violence in different forms was anticipated, but not in such pervasive terms as the survey responses illustrate. Most Agency participants were exposed to high levels of violence in their communities during childhood and/or adolescence, with consequences to their physical and psychological health. Notably, 79% heard shotguns on a regular basis, 65% have been trapped in a shootout, 30% had their home invaded by either the police or criminals, 16% have witnessed a homicide, and 36% have a relative or a close friend who has been victimized in a violent assault or murdered – traumatic incidents which led many of these young people to fear for their own lives (57% grew up afraid of getting killed).

Continuous exposure to violence in everyday life is also widespread. For example, participants reported that the following violent incidents occur in their communities sometimes or frequently: individuals who are not part of the police or military walk around with guns (61%), the police stop and frisk residents (48%), there are shootouts (51%) and a strong presence of drug traffickers (46%). In the 3 months prior to responding to the survey alone, 19% of participants were involved in a serious conflict and 7% were the victims of an armed robbery. Violence can also hamper the physical daily mobility of these young people with roughly 30% and 20% of them estimating that they skip school and work, respectively, at least once a month to avoid shootouts.

Although violence is manifested in the lives of Agency participants mainly within the context of their communities and social surroundings, some of these young people have also experienced violence and trauma inside their own homes. For instance, 30% of participants claimed they were beaten by their parents, siblings or other relatives, and 27% grew up in a household where

fights and screams were common. Out of those who reported getting beaten as a child, 47% grew up in the same home with a family member who was an alcoholic or a drug addict, compared to 24% for those who did not. In addition, given that favelas have been historically dominated by drug factions and the complex patterns of sociability that have shaped the relationship between favela residents and local criminals as a result of it, many Agency participants have closely engaged with individuals involved in criminal activities. A whopping 42% of participants revealed that one of their family members was involved in drug trafficking activities (when considering the proportion of friends involved in crime, this figure jumps to 57%) and roughly 17% reported having a relative or sibling who has been incarcerated.

Table 15. Summary of violent incidents experienced during childhood/adolescence:

Violent incident	%
Was threatened by a police officer	15%
Was threatened by a drug trafficker	5%
Had home invaded by drug traffickers or the police	26%
Was caught in a shootout	57%
Heard gunshots regularly	74%
Saw the body of a dead person	64%
Witnessed a homicide	16%
Feared getting killed	57%
Got hit by other children/youth in the neighbourhood	23%
Was raised in the same household with an alcoholic or drug dependent relative	26%
Got beaten by parents, siblings, or other relatives	30%
Had a family member who was involved in drug trafficking	42%
Had a friend who was involved in drug trafficking	57%
Had a friend who was an alcoholic or used drugs	60%
Had a relative/close friend who suffered a violent assault or was killed	36%

Table 16. Examples of violence in the community surroundings:

Community violence	Frequently or very frequently	Sometimes	Rarely or never
People (non-military/police) walk around with guns	36%	25%	39%
Shootouts	26%	25%	49%
Police stop and frisk residents	26%	22%	52%
Strong presence of drug-traffickers	28%	18%	54%
Imposed curfew	11%	20%	69%

Finally, given that 54% of Agency participants live in favelas that have been impacted by the Pacification security policy, we inquired into their perceptions about the UPPs (Pacifying Police Units) and the work of Rio's military police in general. For the most part, young people harbor negative views of the police and are skeptical of the Pacification and its militarized approach to favelas. For instance, 56% and 44% of participants disagree that UPPs improved the level of security in impacted communities and the lives of residents, respectively, and 61% assent that the police act in a violent and disrespectful manner against the favela youth population.

Nonetheless, results are mixed when considering the question of whether UPPs have become an abusive force inside communities and if the program should come to an end: 37% responded positively, 33% negatively, and 30% were indecisive. This aligns with findings from a study published by PovGov earlier this year in partnership with the Rio-based civil society organizations *Favela's Observatory* and *Maré's Development Network*. A survey conducted with over 6,000 residents of five Rio favelas found that while the relationship between the community and the police is largely rotten (for example, words like fear and mistrust were used by most respondents to describe how they feel about the police), 46% would not like the UPPs to leave their communities, 15% were in favor of the idea, and 38% did not know how to respond (Magaloni, et.al., 2018).

Table 17. Perceptions about the Pacification security policy and police work:

Statements	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
The UPPs improved the security levels in impacted communities	20%	24%	56%
The UPPs improved the lives of residents of impacted communities	28%	28%	44%
The UPPs have become an abusive force and should end	37%	30%	33%
Rio's military police conduct its work strategically and effectively	18%	24%	58%
Rio police officers act violently and disrespectfully against young favela youth	61%	18%	21%

3.4. Family, community life, and the urban experience

As for family structure, roughly 40% of Agency participants were raised by single mothers or by their grandparents and had an absent father who did not participate in their upbringing – a phenomenon which is more prominent amongst black and mixed-race youth (54% and 30% considering black and pardos, respectively, against a 14% rate for whites). Aligned with the picture of social vulnerability just discussed, 17% of participants revealed that one of their parents or siblings has been incarcerated and the same percentage do not feel safe in their own home (a figure that goes up to 33% if we include "neither agree nor disagree" answers).

Despite living in communities where poverty, violence, and family disruptions are often too close to avoid or escape, these conditions are met with an abundance of patterns of support and care. For instance, roughly 74% of young people indicated that their mothers were always involved in their education, 73% have a good relationship with both their immediate and extended family, and 63% feel like they can count on their parents, siblings, and/or grandparents to give them life advice when needed.

When it comes to young people's relationship with their communities, given the complex patterns of sociability that are at the heart of favelas and peripheries (which is driven, inter alia, by interclass differences and feelings of fear and insecurity), the scenario is more unstable. When asked a few questions concerning how they feel about – and engage with – other residents of their community, Agency youth provided mixed responses. While 48% of participants agree that most people in their community take advantage of others when given a chance, in addition to 32% claiming that they generally do not trust local residents, 44% feel like they can count on their neighbors when needed and 38% believe that many community members care about them.

In terms of community engagement, young people are not especially active in formal grassroots arrangements, particularly in comparison to their strong participation in extra-curricular initiatives. For instance, only 22% of participants have been involved with an organization from civil society at some point in their lives, against 57% who took part in at least one educational program outside school in the year prior to responding to the survey. This figure suggests that you people are inclined to take up activities beyond the formal classroom and work responsibilities, but their interest in – or accessibility to – social change platforms is still somewhat limited.

Table 18. Relationship with the community:

Statements	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
Most people in my community take advantage of others when given the chance	48%	28%	24%
Many people care about me in my community	38%	34%	28%
I generally do not trust people in my community	35%	33%	32%
I can count on my neighbors when I need them	44%	26%	30%

The physical and symbolic segregation that separates favelas and peripheries from the more affluent areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro not only determine the rights hundreds of thousands of people have access to and the kind of treatment they are most likely to receive from the government, but it also negatively impacts societal relations amongst citizens – complexities

that must be central to any discussion about the broader urban experience of young people from these communities. Favela and peripheral youth, particularly black males, are known to face negative stereotypes leading to discrimination and racial profiling (which only aggravates victimization levels). This sense of "otherness" is reflected in how some Agency youth judge their city encounters. Considering the answers of all participants, 15% feel discriminated when they frequent urban spaces outside their communities and the same percentage agree that people fear them because of their appearance (these figures jump to 41% and 31%, respectively, when "neither agree nor disagree" answers are accounted for).

Importantly, if we only consider the answers of black males to these two statements the proportion of participants who respond positively to the agreement scale goes up to some extent: within this specific population, 20% feel discriminated and roughly 25% think that people fear them. Controlling by white males, these figures drop to 7% and 0%, respectively, with the greatest majority of respondents (around 86%) disagreeing with the two statements. These results indicate that black males have different experiences, and therefore perceptions, of social discrimination and prejudice compared to their fellow youth. Furthermore, blacks are more likely to be poor (amongst those who receive Bolsa Família, used here as a proxy for poverty, 49% are blacks, 37% pardos and only 9% whites), to be unemployed (56% blacks, 37% pardos, and 6% whites) and not to have an income (49%, 39%, and 10%, respectively).

Table 19. Urban experience:

Statements	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I feel discriminated when I frequent urban spaces outside of my community	15%	26%	59%
I enjoy visiting other areas of the city, including the beach	74%	15%	11%
Residents from more priviledged zones of the city tend to be arrogant	38%	35%	27%
I feel that people fear me because of my appearance	15%	16%	69%
Walking around other urban spaces outside of my community does not feel any different	42%	24%	34%

3.5. Personality and well-being

The efforts Agency place in diversifying its pool of potential participants through the mobilization and selection process are reflected in the different kinds of young people they attract to take part in the program. From the social butterfly to the introvert, Agency cohorts bring together a mix of characters and personalities, enriching the learning and action space. Considering those who indicated that the following traits describe them well or very well, roughly 35% of participants declared they are generally chosen by their friends to lead a given

activity and 32% see themselves as artists, while 38% confessed they are mainly quiet and keep to themselves and 29% said they are not at all the kind of person who would raise their hand to speak in front of others. And yet, despite their distinct approaches to social situations, participants are equally supported and stimulated by Agency staff to practice leadership within the scope of their projects – which can be a helpful exercise particularly for youth who have a hard time developing their communication skills and feel uncomfortable being on the spotlight.

As for the overall self-esteem of participants, survey results paint a rather optimistic picture. Roughly 86% of participants claimed to love their skin color, 83% believe that they have many qualities, 78% feel good with who they are, 77% feel proud of themselves, and 70% like what they see when they look in the mirror. In this case, however, we also notice differences in perceptions and viewpoints per racial groups. For example, although the overall number of young people who responded negatively to these statements is rather small (between 4-7%), black youths are three times more likely than whites not to believe they have good qualities (64% against 21%), 2.3 times less likely not to feel good about themselves (58% against 25%) and not to like their reflection in the mirror (44% against 19%); and yet, both groups feel proud of themselves at the same rate. Concerning self-perception in relation to race specifically, black youth are slightly more likely than mixed-race and white young people to love their skin color (89% compared to 86% and 82%, respectively), which speaks volumes to their capacity to embrace and uphold their sense of self-worth in the face of commonplace racial discrimination.

Table 20. Self-perception and self-steem:

Statements	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I feel good about myself	78%	15%	7%
I believe I have many qualities	83%	13%	4%
I generally see myself as a loser	13%	18%	69%
I am proud of myself	77%	18%	5%
Most times, I like what I see when I look in the mirror	70%	21%	9%
I would like to change something on my face	26%	20%	54%
I love my skin color	86%	9%	5%
I generally feel unsatisfied with my appearance	26%	21%	53%

While Agency youth demonstrate to have a generally strong sense of self and identity when it comes to their mood state the scenario is less balanced. Taking into account the responses of participants who indicated grappling with the following feelings frequently or sometimes, 68% get angry, 65% lose patience with people easily, 57% feel distressed and 56% feel like crying. In addition, 41% revealed that they feel sad or depressed at the same rate. Nevertheless, by and

large, these young people are quite positive about their future, with 68% feeling good or very good about it and less than a quarter displaying feelings of fear and/or uncertainty in light of their life prospects.

Table 21. Mood state:

Feelings	Frequently or very frequently	Sometimes	Rarely or never
Feel distressed	17%	40%	43%
Feel like crying	20%	36%	44%
Feel lonely	18%	33%	49%
Get angry	28%	40%	32%
Lose patience with people	27%	35%	38%
Feel sad or depressed	15%	26%	59%

In all, considering the full discussion above, despite living face to face with poverty, violence, discrimination and state indifference, Agency youth display great resilience, a positive outlook on life, and an enormous potential to negotiate their own futures and work through adverse social and economic conditions. These results align with findings from in-depth studies about favela sociabilities and resistance (Perlman, 2010; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2013) demonstrating that, in defiance of numerous hardships, dwellers continue to find the strength and resilience to keep moving forward, learning to cope with the fears and struggles of their daily lives while holing tight to the joy, hopes, and dreams that allow them to believe in a better tomorrow.


ARTE ESCOLA
LULA LIVRE
MARIANA

Section 4: Participant Experience and Program Outcomes

4.1. First contact, motivation, and overall program experience

As laid out in chapter 2, before the beginning of each cycle, Agency undertakes a week-long mobilization process that involves dozens of program staff members circulating some of the city's most marginalized communities and working energetically to attract socioeconomically vulnerable young people to sign up for the program. Yet, only 17% of participants got to know the methodology immediately through this method. Instead, the focal point of Agency's marketing and recruiting strategy lies in the good old "word of mouth," with roughly 58% of Agency youth having been first introduced to the program either through a family member, friends, or a former participant. Friends and family are also a major source of encouragement when it comes to supporting participant's decision to move forward with their enrollment: 52% indicated to have been influenced by them, while 29% took the initiative on their own, and 18% were motivated by Agency's team.

In terms of reasons leading to participation, some of the core principles around bottom-up community action and youth empowerment guiding much of Agency's methodology seems to be key in driving young people's involvement. From a list of several given motives, 37% of participants indicated that what mainly got them excited to take part in the program was the opportunity to work with people who recognize the favela youth as potent individuals and agents of transformation, while 35% were attracted by the promise of community engagement. The percentage of young people who selected options directly related to increasing their chances for employment and/or opening a business adds up to 18.

It is important to note, however, that when formulating this particular survey question, we left out a very important driving element for participation: the financial incentive – an overlook that our qualitative interviews helped to illuminate. In conversation with our research team, several young people mentioned that, initially, the monthly allowance offered (though small) is what made the program appealing to them, and so did the possibility to have their own projects financed in the future. Former participants Romulo Johann and Raquel Spinelli from the favelas of City of God and Pinto's Hill in Providência, respectively, shared their motivation thoughts when they first came across Agency:

> How did I learn about Agency? It is a crazy story. I had just woken up and was on the street flying kites wearing nothing but short shorts (laughter). Then my step-mother screamed at me from the house and said: "Look, they are offering a course over there... they pay you R$100 per month." There was no need to say anything else. I thought to myself: "Wow, R$100 per month?" I was fifteen years old back then and that was a lot of money, which I could have guaranteed every month. And that is how everything started (Romulo Johann, Cidade de Deus).

> I lived in a favela my entire life and have always wanted to do something for my community, but I didn't know what or how. That is when Agency came in and told me: "We can give you R$10,000 to realize something in your territory." I found it to be a great opportunity and I needed money badly at that time, so the monthly allowance of R$100 was also very appealing (Raquel Spinelli, Providência).

Once in the program, much beyond receiving financial support, participants are exposed to a range of new experiences. Meeting new people (59%), the learning process (54%), the exposure to new ideas and discourses (45%), and the involvement with the community (42%) are some of the learning and engagement aspects of the methodology that young people liked the most. Yet, alongside all these new experiences come expectations and responsibilities, and to some participants, going through the methodology means having to face personal insecurities, amongst other challenges.

For instance, the leading difficulties young people grapple with in the program are: losing the fear of speaking in public (33%), being able to expose ideas clearly (31%), "selling" their project to the external committee (26%), developing the logistics necessary to carry out the project on the ground (20%), in addition to managing to negotiate work and school schedule with the program meetings (19%). In all, considering these overall experiences, whether exciting or scary at first, Agency manages to create an atmosphere young people feel is worth their while. Reflective of this, the level of participant satisfaction is extremely high, with 93% of survey responders claiming they are satisfied or very satisfied with the program. Aline, a 27-year-old from the Batan favela, speak of her positive engagement with the program as being, in fact, eye-opening:

> Agency put us in a place we were, until then, unable to see. We become the protagonist of our actions. And this changed me; it opened my mind to new life paths I can take (Aline, Batan).

Table 22. Program engagement and learning aspects participants liked the most:

Engagement and learning aspects	%
Meet new people	59%
Get to know other parts of the city	30%
The learning process	54%
Develop a project from start to finish	48%
The involvement with the community	42%
The exposure to new ideas and discourses	45%
Learn about entrepreneurship	38%
Support in helping advance my life project	42%

4.2. Participant's perceptions of life skills developed and benefits gained

Putting if briefly, life-skills (also known as non-cognitive, soft or socio-emotional skills) consist of attitudes, behaviours, and personality traits which facilitate success in important dimensions of life (such as in community, school, and the workplace) including self-perception, resilience, optimism, motivation, creativity, social and communication skills, amongst others (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Public Profit, 2014). These patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior are developed before and throughout children's school years and continuously in the course of people's lives. Although there is much debate around, for example, their multidimensionality and heritability, personal qualities and attributes beyond cognitive abilities are widely recognized as important dimensions of human capital which must be incorporated into formal and non-formal educational processes (Baker, 2013; Kautz et.al., 2014; Lundberg, 2017; Whitehurst, 2016).

With this literature in mind, our study found that Agency's methodology – acting as an interactive learning space outside the formal system of education – has the potential to boost young people's life skills in a broad sense of the framework. As per the self-reported perceptions of participants about their own development process inside the program, strong gains were experienced in their capacity to do the following: engage in teamwork (78%), get more organized and concentrate in one activity (72%), make decisions (70%), and speak in public (66%). In addition, a large share of participants indicated improvements in their motivation to learn and in their critical thinking process when exposed to new ideas and discourses. Aligned with the survey findings, the enhancement of these various skills was also featured quite prominently during the interviews and focus groups.

The accounts below help showcase ways in which real-life processes of personal development, occurring at a given point in time and in a particular setting, can impact young people's lives as they themselves interpret it. Juan Luis and Ramon, both 18-year-olds from communities in Rio's West zone, reflect on recognizing community and personal potential as part of developing their projects, while Lais and Gabriela, from Guandu and Rocinha, respectively, discuss improvements in communication and group engagement abilities:

> I look at things differently now; I learned to see potential not only in myself but also in the people around me. Sometimes we look at others and assume they don't have much to add when all these people need to bring out their talent is to have someone believe in them... so, it is about judging less and supporting more (Juan Luis, Veridiana)

> What changed once I joined Agency is that now I believe in myself much more, I believe that I can go beyond. I saw that I can't allow my fears to limit what I can do and become... I didn't think I was good at anything before but being an English instructor in a project we developed, and seeing people learning, gave me confidence in my capacity as a teacher (Ramon, Ucrânia).

> Speaking in public was the hardest challenge I had to overcome at Agency. The first time I had to present the project idea in front of people my nerves got the best of me; it was horrible. Today, I still get nervous, but at least the words come out. This is definitely something that changed for the best (Lais, Guandu).

> Agency taught me a lot about teamwork. In the beginning, whenever my ideas did not match with that of the other girls in the group, I would just get mad and drop everything… then, eventually, we managed to sit down and talk, to think things through together. I was also very shy at first, both in terms of public speaking and socializing, and that also got much better (Gabriela, Rocinha).

Table 23. Self-reported life skills developed through Agency:

Abilities and skills	% A lot	% Somewhat	% Not much
Work in group	78%	18%	4%
Make decisions	70%	24%	6%
Speak in public	66%	24%	10%
Organize ideas and concentrate in one activity	72%	20%	8%
Formulate arguments to convince people of what I think	66%	27%	7%
Think critically about new ideas and discourses	67%	26%	7%

The reported benefits enjoyed by program participants go beyond improved life skills, stretching across the self-confidence, educational, and employment dimensions (although some of these outcomes must be approached with much caution, as will be noted). For instance, 70% of young people agree that Agency helped improve their self-esteem, while 83% and 79% were encouraged by the program to continue their studies and improve their professional life, respectively. Participants also attribute to Agency the increased exposure to work opportunities more broadly (46%) and even a concrete job offer (17%).

Albeit these results demonstrate Agency's potential to help pave work pathways for young people (many who rely on the informal labor market as their main source of income, as pointed out earlier), being self-reported and limited to one single survey, there is no evidence as to their validity and reliability. In fact, given the short timeframe of the intervention, I would be difficult to make any kind of claims about Agency's impact on participant's formal education and work trajectories; being that the former is slow-moving (traditionally, each grade takes one year to complete) and the later unsteady (informal employment tends to be volatile), a causal analysis of this kind would require continuous data collection at different points in time.

Improving these aspects of young people's lives are, however, not explicit program targets, and

any related benefit (particularly in terms of work opportunities) can be perceived as a positive outcome of the networking platform and engagement stimulus participants are exposed to. In this regard, in addition to getting connected with professionals who work in their field of interest (61%), through Agency, participants claim that they also got the chance to make friends with similar interests to their own (70%).

Table 24. Self-reported benefits gained through Agency:

Benefits	% Agree or strongly agree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Disagree or strongly disagree
Agency helped improve my self-esteem and self-confidence	70%	23%	7%
Agency stimulated me to continue my studies	83%	14%	3%
Agency helped me develop my professional life	79%	4%	17%
Agency opened doors to new work opportunities	46%	34%	20%
Agency connected me with professionals who work in my field of interest	61%	26%	13%
I got a job through contacts I made at Agency	17%	34%	49%
I met a group of friends with similar interests at Agency	70%	21%	9%

When it comes to urban mobility – understood in this study as increased exposure to cultural, educational, and recreational spaces available in the city – Agency strives to advance this central program objective in a context where a large proportion of young people still experience a considerable limitation in enjoying such platforms. The pre-intervention survey showed that a large proportion of to-be participants had never set foot in places considered hubs for cultural exposure and learning such as libraries (21% indicated to have never visited one), museums (36%), theatre (38%), bookstore (35%), and universities (69%). Reflective of this is the fact that while 57% of participants reported leaving the favela several times per week, less than half of those (27%) do so to frequent different urban spaces.

Given that, in Rio de Janeiro, cultural and educational platforms (especially the more structured ones) tend to be concentrated in the city center and larger surrounding metropolitan areas, we compared results by place of residence but found no significant difference. In fact, considering selected spaces, participants who reside in centrally-located communities such as Providência and Batan are slightly more likely than participants from favelas in Pavuna and Santa Cruz – areas far away from the city center displaying high poverty rates – to have limited mobility. For instance, the percentage of youth who never visited a library is 22% amongst residents of Pavuna, and 25% and 39% amongst residents of Providência and Batan, respectively. This result suggests that exclusion from these "turned-eliticized" spaces may have more to do with the consequences of social stratification rather than geographical proximity.

With this scenario in mind, the percentage of participants who, post-intervention, indicated to have visited selected relevant spaces at least one time in the 3 months prior to the survey is comparable (or higher) to their reported visits pre-intervention and within a timeframe of one year. And although we cannot attribute these results solely to young people's participation in the program, it can be said that Agency-sponsored activities (i.e. excursions, events, leisure visits to different sites) are partially responsible for helping expand young people's circulation in the city. The interviews help illuminate this linkage.

> I visited many places thanks to Agency, like a Botanical Garden, a music studio, a concert, a movie festival... these are all places I had never been to (Gabriela, Rocinha).

> My mobility expanded a lot once I joined Agency. I wandered around before, but I had never had the chance to go to some of the places they took me to such as concerts and even a Cirque du Solei show; that was all thanks to Agency. These things are expensive, so I could have never paid for it on my own (Raquel, Providência).

Table 25. Comparative of places visited by participants pre-and-post intervention [13] (at least once and considering different timeframes):

	Pre-Agency	Post-Agency
Places	% At least one time in the last year	% At least one time in the past 3 months
Library	69%	61%
Museum	56%	45%
Theatre	54%	67%
Bookstore	59%	52%
Universities	23%	34%
Workshops, lectures, or conferences	46%	61%

Considering that favela youth traditionally lack access to platforms for personal development and tools for engagement outside the scope of their immediate lives and social environment, strengthening their prospects in relation to what they can do and become is essential to their personal flourishing. In this sense, the expansion of life skills, networks, and city-wide mobility promoted by Agency – which serves to expose participants to new opportunities, frames of reference, learning experiences and encounters – are important mechanisms of empowerment which stimulate young people to think and act beyond the restricting social structures shaping their lifeworld.

[13] Comparative results from this particular variable consider a respondent pool of about 200 participants only.

4.3. Entrepreneurial stimulus and competencies

Although primarily used as an instrument to encourage the peripheral and favela youth to take a position of leadership and use their potential and knowledge to craft solutions to local community problems, the entrepreneurial element of the Agency methodology produces results that stand on their own. This section draws from additional survey responses collected at different points throughout the intervention meant to explore exposure to overall stimulus and technical competencies in project creation and implementation.

A little over 100 participants of the 2016 cycle were asked to rate their exposure to – and engagement with – a variety of entrepreneurial activities before they began the program (survey 1, Sep 2016), at the end of the stimulus cycle (survey 2, Oct 2016), and in its final phase (survey 3, Dec 2016). Here, a distinction is made between the cohort that did not receive the funds to implement their projects and left Agency after the examination board exercise (group 1) and the one that did, receiving further project execution training and network stimulus (group 2). Below we discuss some of the most salient results from this pre-post case series analysis. Once again, it is important to note that this segment of the study relies on an uncontrolled longitudinal design.

First, when it comes to involvement in concrete activities for project creation and implementation, all variables surveyed saw an increase (sometimes twofold) by the final stages of the methodology compared to its onset. For example, asked to reflect on the month prior to responding to the questionnaire, in survey 1, a little over a quarter of participants indicated to have worked directly with project-related tools for mobilization, marketing, strategy creation, and mapping of the target population. By survey 3, those percentages had gone up considerably, even more so for participants who had their projects financed.

In some instances, however, a significant number of participants went into the program already demonstrating involvement in some of the activities that the methodology is intended to promote. Although these variables also rose towards the end of the intervention, by way of illustration, the mean of young people who, prior to Agency, tried to find a physical place to realize a project, and who drew from their personal social history and community needs in its conception, is 56% - which points to an inclination towards selecting participants who possess some exposure to social entrepreneurship concepts and actions. For example, Clara, an 18-year-old from Pavuna who is studying pedagogy at university, went in with the clear idea of creating a book club for children:

> When I joined Agency, I already had the dream to start my own project, and seeing that becoming a reality is very gratifying. My project puts two things that I very much like together: books and children. It is such a great platform to exchange knowledge because I teach the kids but also learn from them. I feel like in every meeting I come out invigorated; it is an amazing experience (Clara, Pavuna).

Table 26. Entrepreneurial activities carried out by participants
(in the month prior to responding to the survey):

Activities	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3 (Grp 1)	Survey 3 (Grp 2)
Worked with marketing and mobilization tools online and/or offline to promote the project	27%	67%	67%	92%
Studied the target audience of a project and how to map these people inside the territory	29%	86%	72%	96%
Identified community needs to inspire the creation of a project that is relevant to residents	57%	89%	62%	91%
Drew from own social history, interests, and knowledge to develop a project concept or idea	59%	80%	75%	74%
Identified a physical place to realize the project	53%	86%	78%	96%
Used visual tools to present a project	25%	81%	63%	91%

As for Agency's network-building initiatives meant to help young people access new (and tap into existing) resources and opportunities to support the development of their ideas, pre-post impact results are also promising, bearing even more relevance to the viabilization of youth projects on the ground. Notably, there was a significant increase in the number of participants who, through Agency, connected with individuals who helped them establish partnerships to advance their projects, who taught them about entrepreneurial concepts, and, especially, who supported their projects financially (as young people build contacts with people of interest, funding opportunities may come through via other platforms beyond Agency). All these variables saw a twofold increase for group 1 and roughly a threefold one for group 2, with slight variations in between.

These results help shed light on the fact that, although some participants who join Agency already have a background in entrepreneurship, the program's educational, financial, mobility, and network incentives are essential to supporting young people in actually concretizing their social action projects. The following remark by Renan from Santa Cruz – whose project provides music lessons to low-performing children in public schools – speak to this opportunity structure available:

> Upon joining the program, I was surprised by the level of accessibility Agency enjoys as they are well-known in the city. When we started to ask around for support for our project and tried to establish partnerships, as soon as we mentioned Agency's name, people would say: "of course, where Globo columnists Ana Paula Lisboa and Marcus Faustini work." This kind of recognition, of course, gave us credibility, to the point that even famous artists would demonstrate an interest in supporting our music classes with the school kids (Renan, Santa Cruz).

Table 27. Contact with individuals who helped stimulate entrepreneurial activities (in the month prior to responding to the survey):

The person I had contact with...	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3 (Grp 1)	Survey 3 (Grp 2)
Helped me set up partnerships to develop a project	34%	83%	65%	96%
Financed a project in which I am involved	9%	42%	27%	70%
Introduced me to entrepreneurial concepts	36%	83%	75%	100%
Took me to visit new places in the city, which helped in the execution of a project	13%	62%	52%	91%
Supported me in concretizing a project idea	31%	78%	55%	87%

Finally, the entrepreneurial stimulus promoted by Agency is also reflected in young people's strengthening of several competencies needed to formulate and successfully carry out their project ideas. In the same vein as the earlier findings of self-reported life-skills developed, participants' perception about their performance in selected project-related tasks over the course of the methodology also points to some improvement, although more moderate. For instance, the proportion of young people who labeled as "difficult or very difficult" the task of describing a project with basis on concrete objectives and actions which can be measured was 17% at survey 1 and 8% at survey 3 (4% amongst group 2 respondents).

Similarly, the share of participants who thought difficult to convince others to join their idea and to delegate responsibilities within a group dropped somewhat from the beginning of the intervention (12% and 13%, respectively) compared to its final stages (8% and 10% considering group 1 responses to the two statements, respectively, and 0% considering group 2). In sum, participants found all project-related tasks presented below slightly less difficult to perform by survey 3, their level of easiness remaining steady or rising in most instances compared to survey 1, particularly considering group 2. These results suggest that, as young people experience first-hand the ins and outs of project creation, they gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of – but also their capacity for engagement in – entrepreneurial activities.

Table 28. Reported level of difficulty performing selected project-related tasks:

Tasks	Easy or very easy				Neither easy nor difficult				Difficult or very difficult			
Cooperate with others to achieve a common goal	S1 64%	S2 63%	S3 (G1) 53%	S3 (G2) 61%	S1 31%	S2 34%	S3 (G1) 45%	S3 (G2) 39%	S1 5%	S2 3%	S3 (G1) 2%	S3 (G2) 0%
Convince others to join my idea	S1 35%	S2 43%	S3 (G1) 43%	S3 (G2) 57%	S1 54%	S2 51%	S3 (G1) 48%	S3 (G2) 43%	S1 12%	S2 5%	S3 (G1) 8%	S3 (G2) 0%
Identify project tasks that need to be carried out and delegate responsibilities	S1 37%	S2 45%	S3 (G1) 37%	S3 (G2) 45%	S1 49%	S2 49%	S3 (G1) 53%	S3 (G2) 55%	S1 13%	S2 7%	S3 (G1) 10%	S3 (G2) 0%

Describe a project with basis on concrete actions/objectives which can be measured	S1 37%	S2 45%	S3 (G1) 42%	S3 (G2) 57%	S1 46%	S2 52%	S3 (G1) 50%	S3 (G2) 39%	S1 17%	S2 3%	S3 (G1) 8%	S3 (G2) 4%

4.4. Community and city-wide engagement

The concept of "sense of community" is a multifaceted one encompassing different dimensions and definitions. In the field of psychology, for instance, one of the most influential frameworks advanced by McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe the term as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members will be met through their commitment to being together" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 9). The broader literature shows that, particularly for young people, a sense of community is strongly tied to their residential neighborhoods. These "social microcosms" represent important learning spaces where youth are exposed to everyday experiences and interactions which help shape their identity, sense of belonging and support (Pretty et al., 2006).

Along these lines, Agency seeks to encourage participants to build a more positive sense of community, and they do so in different ways. First, the localized nature of the methodology provides an opportunity for young people to further interact with their community and its residents – an incentive that the following statements help highlight:

> When I first joined Agency, in order to make contacts and promote the project, I had to walk around the community quite frequently, and today, many people know me in the community because of it. Whereas before I was just one more resident, now, people see me as a facilitator, and many approach me to discuss and ask questions about a variety of local issues (Raquel, Providência).

> The mapping exercise we had to do for the project encouraged me to build a stronger relationship with my community; I was the first time that I truly understood how to go about communicating with other residents (Elaine, Pavuna).

Furthermore, pre-and-post intervention survey results indicate a moderate increase in participation levels in various community activities, although, in some instances, levels of engagement were relatively high, to begin with. For example, in the 3 months prior to starting at Agency, roughly half of participants had been involved in the organization of an event at their local church – which is not an entirely surprising result given their strong religious profile. Still, compared to engagement levels pre-Agency, there is an improvement in, for example, participation in organized community meetings and cultural events, as the comparative table below shows.

Table 29. Participation in community activities
(in the 3 months prior to responding to the survey):

Activities	Survey 1		Survey 2	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Got together with residents to discuss community problems and potential solutions	28%	72%	47%	53%
Helped organize a cultural event in the community	30%	70%	38%	62%
Helped organize a sports event in the community	22%	78%	23%	77%
Helped organize an event at a church or other religious space	49%	51%	44%	56%
Took charge in organizing a community meeting	8%	92%	17%	83%
Participated in protests or other social marches	12%	88%	17%	82%
Got involved in social work to help the community	19%	81%	20%	80%

More fundamentally, at Agency, one's territory represents a window of opportunities, which is reflected in how young people are invited to actively engage with their place of residence through the program. That is, several instruments used in the methodology are meant to help participants recognize their own territory as a place of potency and identify ways in which they can tap into that strength to enact change. The following accounts by Lais and Thaiane, 21 and 19-year olds, respectively, from Guandu, an extensive social housing project in Santa Cruz, speak to this element of the program, with both speaking of a renewed approach to their communities after experiencing Agency:

> We start seeing the place where we come from with different eyes. Instead of seeing it for what it lacks, we begin to identify its actual needs and ask ourselves what is it that we can do to help improve things (Lais, Guandu, Santa Cruz).

> I now feel the need to appreciate and value the place where I come from, even though people talk about it like there is nothing worthy there. My community has many needs, so I need to collaborate any way I can, and understanding this has helped me become more mature (Thaiane, Guandu, Santa Cruz)

As noted earlier, as part of developing their projects, participants make an inventory of existing local assets and establish partnerships with different actors inside their communities who cooperate with them in concretizing their ideas. For example, a young girl who wants to start a project in fashion is encouraged to make connections with local workers and businesses (seamstresses, clothes fabric, individual sellers, etc.), a step that not only serves to support this

girl in projecting herself and advancing her interests, but that also help generate income for other community members. The premise is that by investing in networks inside their communities, these young people can do more than just create a project; they have the potential to change their territory and contribute to reducing inequalities (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). Agency rationalizes this element of the methodology as follows:

> The favela used to be seen as a place of absolute negation, where nothing could be done, where no value was recognized. Agency seeks to invert this logic by showing the favela youth that such space offers fundamental elements for their projects. And that, being from the favela, they can indeed become creators in life and in the world, recognizing the territory from under the lens of the opportunities and potentiality it presents them with (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015, p. 69).

As Agency youth are stimulated to tap into the vast potential of their communities to develop their projects, they take steps towards breaking with the social barriers still so prominent in Rio de Janeiro. One of the demands of this "city dispute," as Agency puts it, is to support the favela youth in building a space for visibility and representation, so they can bring to light their plight and potentiality. In this sense, Agency stands out from other provisions directed at favela dwellers precisely for its commitment to producing presence in the city by presenting and representing what exists in these unique and complex communities from the eyes of its youth population.

Connecting back to the earlier discussions on mobility expansion and network building, Agency seeks to rupture with the socially constructed borders that forcibly separate bodies and ideas while inviting young people – who were for so long dislocated – to experience the city in its richness and totality. Yet, broadening young people's right to enjoy and be an active part of the city goes beyond promoting access to restricted spaces, engagement with new groups of people, and expanding mobility. Perhaps the most important proposal is to encourage youth to develop a critical view of their relationship with the city, exploring its differences, and recognizing their position in it, as well as that of their communities (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015).

Melo's in-depth analysis of Agency's methodology – which explored program instruments vis-à-vis elements of critical pedagogy – found that teaching and learning under the Agency platform stimulate participants to think critically about their place in the world, their living conditions, as well as different issues and discourses impacting their communities. The advancement of tools that promote critical analysis of dominant discourses and unequal social structures is, however, meant to go beyond supporting young people in the process of broadening their political conscience and social critique, to encourage them to use that reflection to realize their potential for social engagement (Melo, 2018). That is, in a praxis-oriented fashion, participants not only identify, describe, personalize and debate these issues, but they effectively come up with solutions for them, as the next section illustrates.

4.5. Projects created and territorial impact

As noted, Agency problematizes the social and political environment of the city and provides young people with instruments to carry out actions of social impact, but participants themselves define what to do and how to do it, with whom to work, and to what public to direct their projects – which serve to stimulate self-confidence and a sense of autonomy. Hence, each participant is given a "permanent possibility to choose," backed by proper orientation and an active support system, program educators note (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). A few weeks into the methodology, once the focus is directed towards project creation, participants are asked to fill out a questionnaire entitled "strategic planning," which forces them to think seriously about the mission and main objective of their projects, as well as their role in concretizing them.

They brainstorm with questions such as: "What issue impacting my territory my project seeks to address? What dreams motivate my project? What actions are necessary to develop my project? What kind of results do I expect my project to have? amongst others. Stimulus and messages are provided throughout, so that project ideas advanced remain close to the needs, conditions, and realities of communities, reflecting also participants' knowledge base and understanding of the human and cultural capital present in those spaces. A review of informational documents on the roughly 200 original projects created by favela youth through the Agency methodology shows that the ideas and motivation behind these initiatives are as varied as participants' backgrounds, life experiences, and personal interests; yet, they share an element of innovation and context-relevant transformation. Accordingly, 65% of participants agree that a project is beneficial to the local population only if connected to people's necessities and realities.

With that, the range of different projects created by Agency participants is significant and covers initiatives related to a variety of thematics and issues. From projects to support education and professional development to residents of all ages, to initiatives dedicated to sports, leisure, health, community journalism and the environment, as well as platforms to promote black identity and favela culture , these young people are making full use of their knowledge of the territory to create solutions to address critical challenges and the real needs of the population in those spaces – conditions which would be difficult for actors coming from the outside to fully recognize. This approach is based on the conviction that no owner is better positioned than a favela resident to say what the community needs the most.

For instance, the *Girls Moto-Taxi*, a project developed during the 2015 cycle by an all-female group of participants from João XXIII in Santa Cruz, proposed an alternative transportation option for girls and women in the community. Many Rio favelas are located in steep mountains, making it difficult for residents to move in and out, particularly those living in the highest points of the territory. Access to and availability of public transportation such as buses and vans can be quite restricted – which makes moto-taxis ideal modes of transportation for their facility to

squeeze into small streets and alleys. Although they do not enjoy full legal status and are still very much criminalized in some communities, these moto-taxis offer a reliable (and cheap) transportation option for thousands of favela residents to get to and from their houses in addition to generating work (especially for young people). To this extent, the project not only targeted public transportation needs but also created an opening to address issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in favelas.

Agency projects have also touched on the critical issue of violence, with young people taking the front seat in advancing creative ways to help mitigate rivalry between communities. As has been noted, since the boom of the cocaine trade in the early 1980s, Rio favelas have become contested spaces and hubs for turf wars protagonized by rival drug factions and militias over territorial control. In addition to placing the lives of thousands of residents who are "caught in between" at risk, this nonstop conflict also spawns estrangement and animosity amongst residents of different communities under the control of rival drug factions. Facing this complex social scenario, during the 2012 cycle, a group of participants from Fumacê decided to use the Agency platform to create a space for community coexistence through dance. *Mosaico* then emerged as an initiative that took place inside a public school located in the "border" between the historically rival communities of Fumacê and Batan, bringing together children and youth from the two territories under the same roof to take funk and hip-hop lessons - an activity that most young people can relate to and enjoy, regardless of what favela they come from.

To name another context-relevant initiative, *Providing in Favor of Life* is a project focused on women's empowerment and teenage pregnancy in the Providência favela. Considering that, in Rio de Janeiro, most women who die due to complications during childbirth are poor, low-educated and black (Silva, 2016), the significance of making initiatives of this kind available to young moms living in favelas and peripheries scattered throughout the city cannot be stressed enough. Created during Agency's inaugural cycle in 2011, what began as a platform to offer emotional support, neonatal care education and professional development to teenage moms (activities that are still ongoing) is now also a space dedicated to adult education, providing night classes in literacy training and GED courses to the broader community. Having attended over 200 pregnant girls and young mothers in its almost six years of existence (in addition to the more recent participants in the adult education courses) the project became a support mechanism for many young girls and families in the community, becoming its very own NGO.

The extent to which the various Agency youth-led strategies have reached community members from different favelas (it is estimated that, since the program inception, several thousand people have been directly or indirectly impacted by these projects at one point or another), the diverse populations benefited (children, young people, adult learners, job seekers, local artists, business owners, etc.), and the various platforms that have served as catalysts for these actions (from public schools and community centers to improvised

auditoriums and residents' own homes), illuminates how local actions can help build stronger communities, drawing from their demands and building from their opportunities.

Although the many accounts of transformation and resistance motivated by these youth projects could not be comprehensively illustrated in a study of this scope, the discussion above give us a glimpse of how young people employ their knowledge, agency, and potential in benefit of local change – findings which speak to the potential of young people, with their energy and creativity, to help reduce inequalities in contexts of marginalization when given the right incentive and tools. Ultimately, employing local culture as a weapon in the fight to break through social barriers, Agency places young people at the center of territorial transformation, helping them understand their crucial position in empowering their communities and building new narratives of favela and peripherical representation.

Figure 1. Projects developed through the Agency methodology
(Total of 195 projects created by main category, including examples):

21% Arts and culture	**ConnectCult** | Connect youth from schools and orphanages trough culture, having them collectively engage in theater, grafitti, and circus workshops.
19% Education and training	**Come on over** | An incubator offering entrepreneurship opportunities for young people with courses and training in car washing, jewerly-making, English, and barbering.
11% Sports and leisure	**CDD patina** | Extend the recreational universe of CDD with the promotion of skating activities in public community squares to children aged 6-12.
9% Social work and cmty support	**Towards the future** |Platform holding events and meetings between homeless people and community actors of interest who can provide them with some assistance.
8% Favela fashion and style	**Stilizing** | Barber shop and men's fashion spot providing customized hair cuts/clothes based on the original style coming out of Beco do Manassés in the Fumacê favela.
6% Environment and ecology	**RecycleArt** | Re-use of recycled materials for handicraft and arts production in Cantagalo.
5% Audiovisual	**Cine Batan** | Cineclub focused on national cinema that holds movie sessions followed by debates in the homes of residents of Batan.
4% Journalism and media	**Maré sees it** | Promotion of citizen participation in the generation of information and other contents (news, artistical expressions, etc.) for a community virtual portal.
3% Poetry and literature	**Seeds** | Educational space for children encouring them to develop a closer contact with books and to take part in interactive activities such as storytelling and film workshops.
3% Local tourism	**From CDD to the world** | Educational tourism for children focused on teaching and promoting the history of the Cidade de Deus favela.
3% Food and culinary	**Quentex** | Homemade food sale and professional training aimed at supporting local street food vendors.
3% Internet and gaming	**One hand login another** | Digital inclusion project focused on providing internet support to elderly people.
6% Other	**My Afro world** | A suppport platform for Black young girls that, in addition to conducting workshops on Afro braiding, also offer suplementary classes in Portuguese and math.


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Section 5: Impact Evaluation

5.1. Impact evaluation design and sampling strategies

This impact evaluation involved a quasi-experimental design with a treatment group (a group of youth who applied to Agency and were selected to take part in the program) and a control group (a group of youth who applied to Agency but were not selected as, due to financial constraints, only a limited number of participants are accepted each cycle). The control group serves as a counter-factual to measure what would have happened to the beneficiaries had they not been selected to participate in Agency.

In contrast to experimental impact evaluations, which randomly assign interventions across two groups (treatment and control), quasi-experimental evaluations construct control groups with statistical techniques. This impact evaluation is based on what is known as a "natural experiment". We exploit the fact that those individuals who applied to Agency but were not selected are very similar in their characteristics to those who managed to secure a spot in the program. For this analysis, we use a sample of 237 individuals. The control group consists of 120 individuals and the treatment group of 117.

One of the main challenges of the study's empirical strategy is to ensure that the control group is as similar as possible to the treatment group in terms of the variables that simultaneously affect the decision to participate in the program and the outcomes of interest. To this end, this impact evaluation uses two strategies: a strategy to match individuals between the treatment and the control group and Difference in Difference (DID) statistical analysis contrasting treatment and control groups, before and after participaton in Agency. The first strategy, matching, is a technique that "balances" the treatment and control group in terms of the variables that are predictive of program participation, which in turn are correlated with the outcomes of interest.

To achieve this balance, the strategy is to look for individuals in the control group who are similar to those in the treatment group based on these variables. The second strategy, DID, consists of comparing the outcome of interest over time between treatment and control groups. Individual weights for the control group were estimated using inverse probability treatment weights. In order to minimize differences between the treatment and control groups, this algorithm also computes weights for the variables that are predictive of program participation. This technique performed better than other matching strategies.

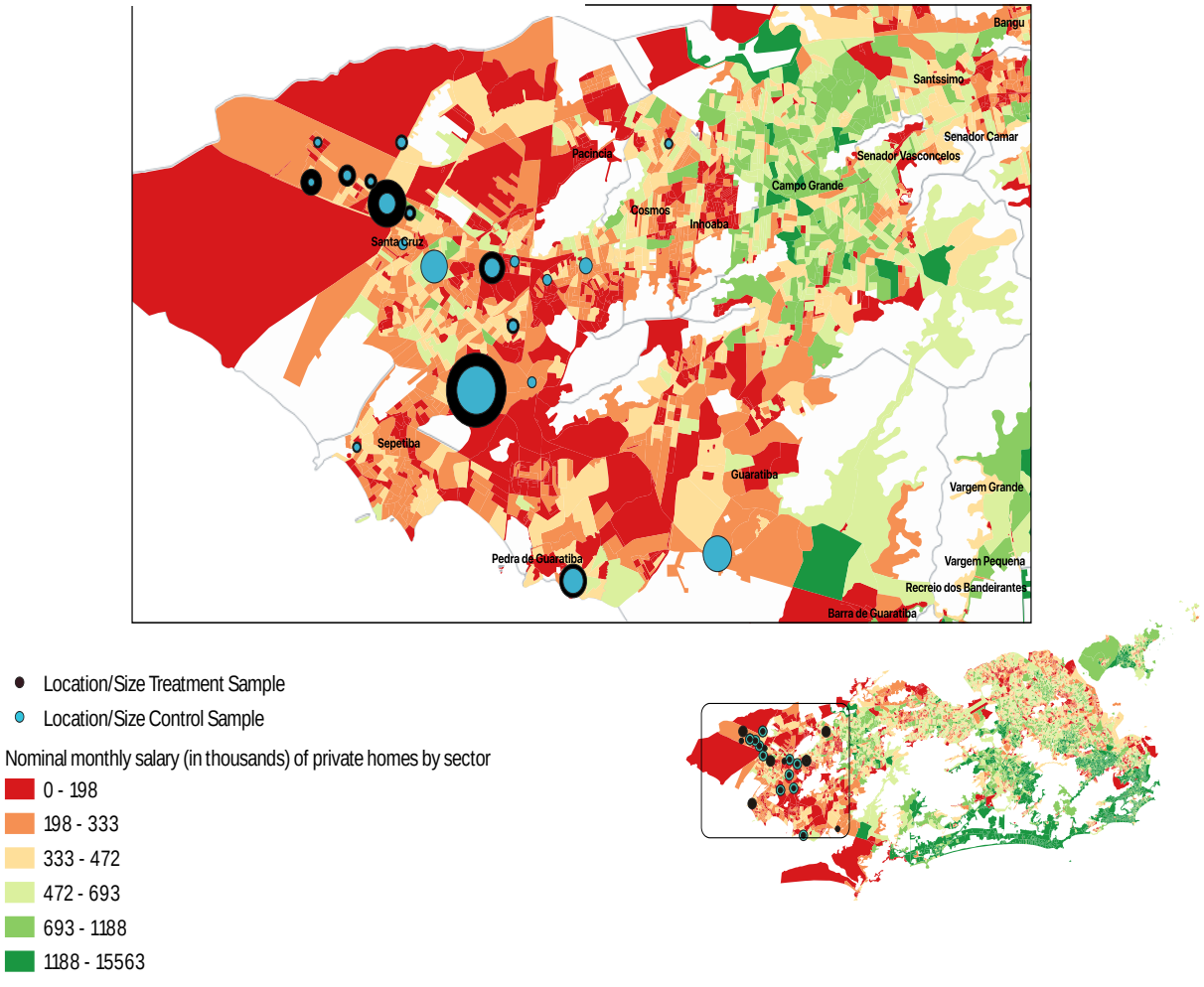
The results of the impact evaluation indicate that the Agency program had a positive and statistically significant effect on several variables. Particularly, the program proved to have a significant impact on variables related to business development, formal employment, social

engagement, and personal wellbeing. The results of the impact evaluation will be presented below. Firstly, we display a map that provides descriptive geographical information on the sample used for the impact evaluation. Secondly, we perform the impact evaluation by three different categories of outcomes: business and employment, social engagement, and personal wellbeing.

5.2. Geographical distribution of the sample

In this section, we provide a brief descriptive geographical analysis of both the treatment and control groups. The map below identifies the average nominal monthly salary of homes by sector. The redder the sector is displayed on this map, the lower the income in that sector. The opposite is true for sectors displayed in green. In the bottom right side, the area within the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro where the entirety of the sample originates from is identified (black dots). This smaller map also reveals how the sample comes from the lower-income sectors in the region. The zoomed-in portion of the map distinguishes the treatment sample (black dots) from the control sample (blue dots). The fact that there is a significant overlap of black and blue dots reveals that individuals in both groups come from the same neighborhoods. This descriptive geographical analysis provides further evidence supporting the strength of the comparability between the treatment and control groups.

Figure 2. Location of treatment and control sample



5.3. Business development and employment

Our analysis found a large, statistically significant effect on formal employment. The model (displayed in figure 1.1 of the appendix) predicts an increase in the likelihood of being employed of 9 percentage points for those in the treatment group compared to the control group (see table 30).[14] Furthermore, the program had significant effects on the probabilities of participants opening a business, trying to open a business, and planning to open a business. Participants were asked three questions related to opening a business. More specifically, they were asked whether, in the past 3 months, they had 1) "opened their own business," 2) "tried to open a business, but failed," and 3) "engaged in activities to open their own business." The binary variables of these three questions were used to estimate the probabilities. The results of these models are displayed in tables 31, 32 and 33, respectively.

Predicted probabilities: Formal employment and business entrepreneurship
Logit model using inverse probability matching

Table 30. Percentage of participants in formal employment:

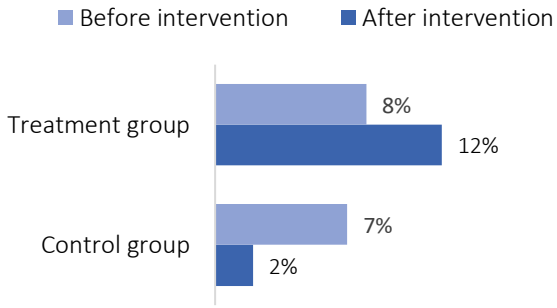


Table 31. Percentage of participants who opened their own business in the past 3 months:

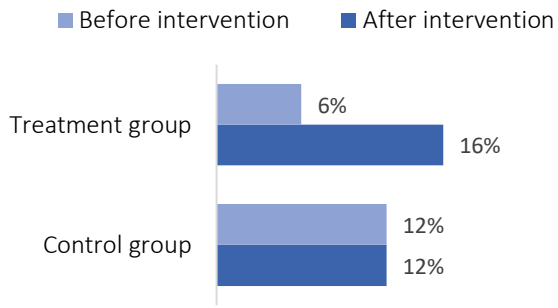


Table 32. Percentage of participants who tried to open their own business in the past 3 months, but failed:

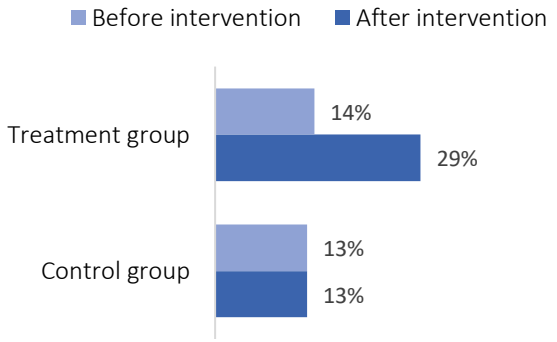
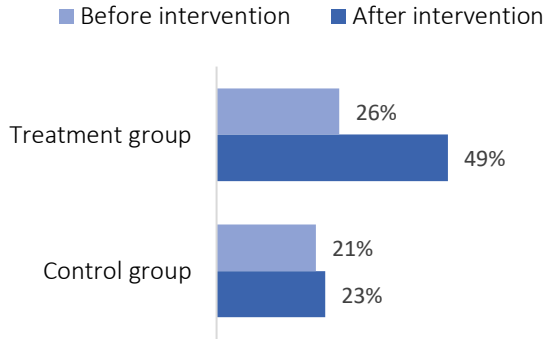


Table 33. Percentage of participants who engaged in activities to open a business in the past 3 months:
(i.e. wrote business plan, funding proposal)



[14] The impact of the program is estimated by subtracting the difference in the probability of employment between wave 2 and wave 1 for the treatment group from the corresponding difference for the control group. The estimated effect in the formal employment (cartera assinada): (12% - 8%) – (2% - 7%) = 9 percentage points.

Specifically, there was a large, statistically significant effect on opening a business. The model predicts an increase in the likelihood of opening a business of 11 percentage points for individuals in the treatment group. Moreover, there was an increase in the likelihood of trying to open a business (but failing) of 14 percentage points for Agency participants. Finally, there was an increase in the likelihood of planning to open a business of 21 percentage points for program participants.

These results suggest that the Agency program can be an effective strategy to incorporate youth in the formal job market and to incentivize them to engage in entrepreneurial activities. It confirms anticipated outcomes given the nature of the program and its focus on providing participants with the tools so they can develop their own businesses.

In regards to the overall "entrepreneurial spirit" of study participants, it should be noted that individuals in both groups displayed a considerable level of business engagement from the baseline survey, with youth in the control group being slightly more likely to have tried to open a business in the 3 months prior to answering it (12% and 6% for the control and treatment group, respectively). Importantly, this figure reflects the high levels of youth participation in informal work given the scarce opportunities for formal employment – a pressing issue in Brazil and beyond. It also raises important questions about the Agency's internal process of selecting participants from the pool of applicants, with results suggesting a potential preference for selecting youth with a slightly less successful track record in terms of opening a business to take part in the program.

5.4. Community engagement

In this section, we explore some of the ways in which the Agency intervention contributed to improving the community engagement of participant youth. Survey takers were asked to report on their involvement in several activities in the community in the 3 months prior. The binary variable of whether they participated in the corresponding social activity was used to model probabilities, which were then estimated using the margins of a logit model (see appendix for details). Our analysis found a positive effect on the social engagement of participant youth in several surveyed variables.

For example, after the intervention, there was a large, statistically significant effect on the participation of young people in meetings with friends and residents to discuss problems impacting the community and collectively explore solutions. The model predicts an increase in this activity of 20 percentage points for individuals in the treatment group (see table 34). Moreover, survey takers were asked if they had organized a community meeting in the 3 months prior to responding to the questionnaire. Once more, there was a positive and statistically significant effect of engagement in this social activity by young people who participated in Agency. The model predicts an increase in the likelihood of organizing a

community meeting of 11 percentage points (see table 35). Finally, when it comes to taking part in some sort of social work to help the community, the model predicts an increase of 19 percentage points for participant youth (see table 36).

Predicted probabilities: Social engagement
Logit model using inverse probability matching

Table 34. Percentage of participants who, in the past 3 months, met with friends/residents to discuss community problems and improvements:

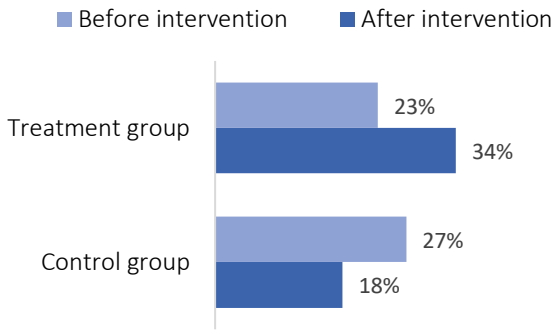


Table 35. Percentage of participants who, in the past 3 months, organized a meeting in the community:

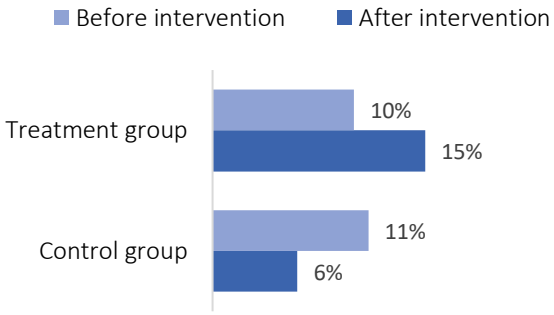
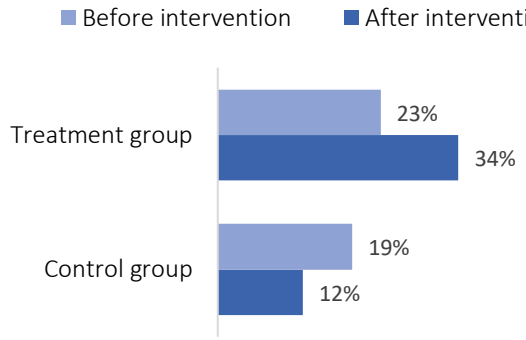


Table 36. Percentage of participants who, in the past 3 months, took part in social work to help the community:



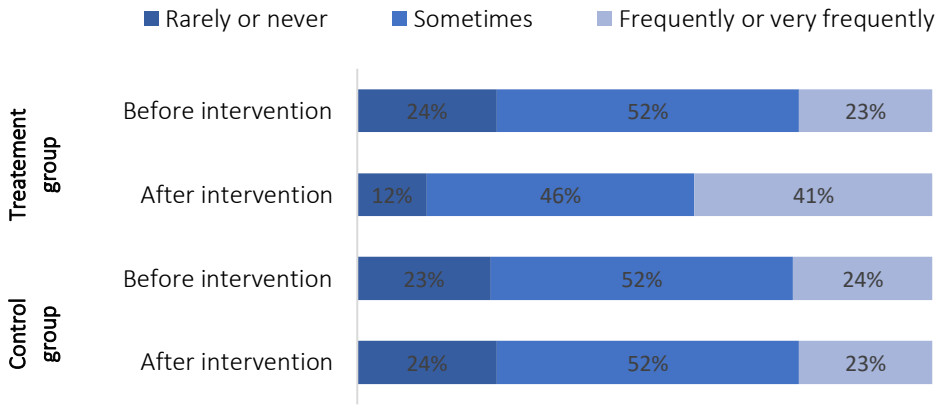
These models indicate that the Agency program serves as a successful platform to incentivize and stimulate young people to get involved in community activities. However, it is important to recall that social engagement is a central component of the methodology, meaning that the bulk of Agency's pedagogical instruments and activities revolve around the need to learn more about – and actively interact with – community members and the territory as a prerequisite for shaping social action. That is, to remain in the program and fulfill their curriculum requirements, young people must get out into the community. This means that, in order to get a more clear picture of the "effect Agency" in boosting youth participation in activities for territorial change, a post-intervention study tracing the patterns of community involvement of former participants past their tenure in the program would have to be conducted.

5.5. Personal empowerment

In this section, we explore how the Agency intervention is helping advance mechanisms to empower young people to see themselves as knowledge holders and change markers. Our analysis found that participation in the program had a positive impact on the personal empowerment of youth, particularly in relation to feeling valued and inclined to approach others to voice their opinions and concerns. Participants were asked whether, in the 3 months prior to taking the survey, they had been in an environment where they felt that their life experiences and knowledge were valued. Respondents could provide answers using the 3-option frequency scale of "frequently or very frequently, sometimes, or rarely or never." Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, we used an ordered logit model to estimate the probabilities of each category (see appendix). As table 37 shows, the probability of responding "frequently or very frequently" was higher amongst former participants after the intervention, while the responses of youth in the control group remained steady across the 3 options considering the baseline and endline surveys.

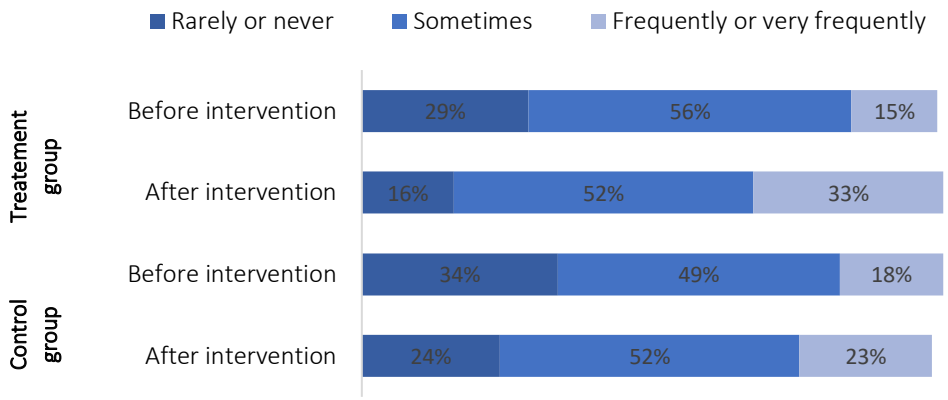
Predicted probabilities: Personal empowerment
Ordered logit model using inverse probability matching

Table 37. Percentage of participants who, in the last 3 months, were in an environment where they felt that their life experiences and knowledge were valued:



Participants were also asked whether they felt comfortable to approach strangers to discuss an idea or issue in the 3 months prior to the survey. Using an ordered logit model, we found that the probability of responding "frequently or very frequently" in the endline survey was much higher for young people in the treatment group compared to those in the control group (see table 38). Results from this model suggest that, by experiencing the Agency methodology and being exposed to its different instruments and incentives, young people feel more empowered to break out of their comfort zone. It can also be said that Agency facilitates young people's engagement with individuals and spaces that are sensitive to their lived experiences and social history.

Table 38. Percentage of participants who, in the last 3 months, felt comfortable to approach people they did not know to discuss an idea or an issue:



Conclusion

Learning summaries and key takeaways

With their activism, energy, creative minds, innovative ideas, lived knowledge, and sensitivity to the plights of their counterparts, it is increasingly recognized that young people should not only take a driving seat in the advancement of strategies to benefit them but also in the shaping of actions to transform communities at large. Inspired by this youth-inclusive drive, this study set out to investigate the approach, practices, and impact of an arts-based educational methodology that seeks to provide youth from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the necessary skills, tools, and resources to lead the design and implementation of social action projects in their communities – which, despite immersed in poverty, violence, and exclusion, brim with potential and hope. Drawing from a mix of qualitative and qualitative data sets, including dozens of focus group discussions and interviews, observations, documentation review, and survey responses from close to 500 young people, our analysis has gathered the following results expanding on (1) program methodology and curriculum, (2) the profile of participants, (3) their experiences in the program along with participant-reported outcomes, (4) and efforts in assessing changes which can be attributed to the intervention.

Learning summary 1 (Methodology and curriculum): Agency's methodology promotes active learning for project creation while strengthening pathways for individual empowerment and community engagement.

Upon a detailed systematization of the Agency methodology and curriculum, we have learned that each Agency instrument – along with their corresponding stimulus and activities – are, collectively, designed not only to expose participants to tools for project creation but also to foster individual empowerment and community engagement. Active learning promoted by these instruments may be positioned within three broader outcome domains, them being, individual empowerment, community learning and engagement, and skills and resources, all of which feed into each other.

Individual empowerment (based on tools and stimulus for reflection, dialogue, expression, creative design, self-organization, teamwork, and social inquiry)

- The *compass* instrument invites participants to identify the motivations, experiences, abilities, resources, forms of expression, and population which have fed into and inspired their projects;
- With the *alphabet* instrument, participants create original concepts and express ideas based on their values and the changes they would like to see in the territory;
- In the *ideas fair*, participants engage in dialogue with young people from different communities, discussing their projects but also suggesting proposals to increase

visibility and support for the favela youth – which help improve their ability to express themselves and maximize their potential for realization as part of a collective effort;
- With the *avatar* instrument, participants assume a negotiated role and are encouraged to take on different responsibilities within their projects, exercising flexibility and orientation in their actions and behavior;
- In the *challenge* exercise, participants reflect on the various instruments of the methodology and carry out a critical evaluation of their projects;

Community learning and engagement (based on tools and stimulus for targeted research, opportunity mapping, knowledge creation, network building, community mobilization, and dialogue)

- Through the *map* instrument, participants explore their communities and create a profile of needs and expectations of the project target population, discovering new aspects of the territory and resources they can tap into;
- In the *inventory* step, participants survey into the various elements, actors, and businesses already present in their territories, being exposed to new opportunities for realization and community assets which help rupture negative stereotypes of favelas they may have internalized;
- During the *one day in the life of my project* exercise, participants engage with the project's target population on the ground, introducing the objectives of the initiative and mobilizing them to get involved, making it a collective strategy that takes place alongside the community;

Resources and skills (based on tools and stimulus for training, network building, mentorship and guidance, educational and professional development)

- Through the *aesthetics of the presentation, event, and examination board* components of the methodology, participants receive training on how to present, execute, and sustain their projects beyond Agency, maximizing their potential to win external funding competitions and successfully carry out their initiatives. They are also introduced to organizations and people of interest who can provide them with project-related advice and support, as well as emotional, educational, and professional guidance.
- During the *pre-incubator* phase, participants receive further training on project design and implementation, are given opportunities to enroll in different educational and professional programs, and continue to access networks and contacts through Agency.

Learning summary 2 (Program participants): Agency is reaching its targeted beneficiary population, engaging some of the most vulnerable – but also resilient and hopeful – youth groups in Rio de Janeiro.

Our investigation into the profile of program participants confirms its focus on the most vulnerable youth groups in the context where it operates. By and large, participants share the

socio-economic conditions set for the target population in their exposure to poverty, violence, crime, as well as particular household, educational, and employment experiences.

Young people, 76% between the ages of 14-21, from dozens of different favelas and peripheral areas scattered across Rio de Janeiro have taken part in Agency. Mainly black or mixed-race (85%) and religious (67%), these young people are also low-income, with close to half not earning a salary at all and one third coming from impoverished families that depend on cash transfer assistance for their survival. Also, 40% were raised in a single-parent household and 17% have a relative who was incarcerated. Working overwhelmingly at the margins of the formal system or out of the labor market altogether (86%), some of those who do have a steady income are financially responsible for others (16%), including children of their own. When it comes to education – although more educated overall and less likely to have skipped formal schooling than their parents – Agency participants encounter serious challenges moving up the educational pipeline such as age-grade distortion, dropouts, and financial restrictions, particularly at the university level when access to public education narrows amongst the poor (only 25% and 3% have a college and high school diploma, respectively). Ranging from social butterflies to introverts in their personality, participants have mixed relationships with their communities and just 22% of them were involved in a civil society platform before Agency.

A reflection of widespread urban insecurity, Agency participants have been continuously exposed to high levels of violence, inside their homes and in their communities. In addition to experiencing traumatic incidents while growing up (i.e. 79% heard gunshots regularly, 65% were trapped in a shootout, 36% have a friend or relative who was murdered, 16% witnessed a homicide) – which fed into the fear of getting killed (57%) – close to one third of these young people experienced beatings by relatives at home and roughly two thirds frequented schools where children assaulted each other physically or verbally. Also, many had a friend or relative involved in drug trafficking (57% and 42%, respectively). More recently, despite state efforts to increase security in these communities through "Pacifying Policing" – a strategy that shows mixed acceptance results amongst this group – crime and violence exposure has persisted. For example, close to half of the participants live in communities where police stop and frisk residents and where armed men walk around with some regularity, and 30% skip work at least once every month due to shootouts. And yet, these young people largely look at their future with optimistic eyes, feel very good about themselves, and proud of who they are, which speaks volumes to their resilience and capacity to hold onto hope.

Learning summary 3 (Participant experience): Agency provides participants with tools to increase their life-skills, networks, urban mobility, community engagement, and entrepreneurial competencies, with the end goal of empowering and enabling them to lead social action.

Our study also explored the experience of participants in the Agency program, assessing their overall involvement, their perceptions in terms of life-skills, benefits and entrepreneurial

competencies gained, changes in engagement with their communities and the city at large, as well as their efforts in leading social action – which are outcome areas that the program hopes to have an impact on.

With word of mouth appearing as an effective tool in attracting recruits, over two-thirds of Agency youth decided to participate in the program due to its promise for bottom-up community action and empowerment (although the financial support also seems to have played a role). Despite one third of participants finding some aspects of the methodology difficult to manage, such as speaking in public and exposing ideas clearly, several of its engagement and learning elements – namely, meeting new people, the exposure to new ideas and discourses, and engagement with the community – were rated highly (59%, 45% and 42%, respectively). At the end of the methodology, participants reported an improvement in several life-skills due to their engagement in the program, including the ability to work in a team, self-organize and concentrate, formulate arguments, make decisions, speak in public, and think critically – all which were reported as having been developed "a lot" in the 66% to 78% range.

Youth also described changes in the self-confidence, education and employment dimensions, with 70% having noticed improvements in their self-esteem, 83% feeling encouraged to continue their studies, 61% being connected to professionals in their field of interest, and 63% being exposed to new work opportunities, including concrete job offers (17%). In terms of urban mobility, Agency youth have experienced an increase in their exposure to cultural, educational, and recreational platforms during their tenure in the program – which can be partially attributed to the encouragement participants receive to circulate and de-eliticize spaces in the city to which they had been historically denied access. Combined, these experiences have contributed to an overall satisfaction rate of 93% amongst participant youth.

In a comparative analysis (using an uncontrolled longitudinal design) of entrepreneurial competencies gained considering young people who had their projects funded (Group 2) and those who did not, therefore leaving the program at an earlier stage (Group 1), we found a significant increase in most variables surveyed. For instance, the proportion of those who worked with marketing and mobilization tools to promote their projects increased by 40 percentile points for Group 1 and 65 for Group 2; a similar increase was seen amongst those who studied strategies to map the target audience for a project in the community and those who used visual tools to present a project. When it comes to network-building to help in the viability of their projects, Agency participants expanded their contact with professionals who helped them set up partnerships (62% increased for Group 2 and 31% for Group 1), provided them with funds (61% Group 2; 18% Group 1), and supported them in concretizing their idea (56% Group 2; 24% Group 1). Participants also experienced changes in their perception of the level of difficulty involved in performing certain project-related activities, such as cooperating with others, identifying tasks, and delegating responsibilities.

We also considered the impact of the methodology on young people's engagement with their communities and fellow residents, finding a moderate increase in their participation in several activities such as the organization of local events and community meetings. Participants also shared personal stories about how the methodology stimulated them to look at and engage with their communities from a place that recognizes their knowledge, resources, and possibilities, tapping into the enormous potential present in those spaces, supporting local actors and networks, and helping create new avenues for empowerment and positive representation. Finally, through exposure to the various instruments and activities of the stimulus cycle – and the skills, tools, and resources that come with it – participants enter the creative process, reflecting, designing, organizing, implementing, and monitoring actions of social impact. Although as varied as participants' backgrounds, life experiences, and personal interests, the roughly 200 original projects developed by Agency participants in fields such as education, arts and culture, journalist, poverty, amongst others, share an element of innovation and context-relevant transformation. Estimated to have impacted thousands of people, directly or indirectly, since their inception, these strategies illustrate the power of local actors and actions in building stronger communities and carving space for the authentic portrayals of peripheral representations, culture, and practices to emerge.

Learning summary 4 (Impact evaluation): Participation in the Agency program has a positive impact on several dimensions of employment, business development, social engagement, and individual empowerment.

The impact evaluation component of our study aimed at assessing the extent to which some of the changes experienced by Agency youth can be attributed to the intervention. To that end, we used a quasi-experimental design with a control group comprised of young people who signed up for the Agency program but were not selected to participate due to funding restrictions, balancing them with the treatment group using matching and DID techniques. Our analysis shows a positive, statistically significant effect on variables related to employment and business development, social engagement, and personal empowerment.

Considering participation in formal employment, our model predicts an increase in the likelihood of having a job of 9 nine percentage points for the treatment group compared to the control, which suggests that Agency's strategies in areas such as skills development and networking building are also helping incorporate youth in the formal job market. As for supporting the engagement of young people in entrepreneurial activities, we learned that those in the treatment group were more likely to have carried out activities to open a business, such as creating a business plan and proposal (21% increase in likelihood), to have tried to open a business with no success (14%), and to have effectively opened a business (11%) – results which speak to Agency's position as a youth incubator for social innovation.

When it comes to impact in the sphere of community engagement, we found an increase by 20 percentage points in the level of participation of young people in the treatment group in community meetings to discuss problems in the territory and explore solutions. A positive, statistically significant effect was also seen in the organization of community meetings (prediction of 11% increase) and participation in social work (19%). Finally, our analysis found that Agency is helping advancing mechanisms to empower young people, particularly in terms of positioning themselves as knowledge holders and change markers. For instance, the likelihood of having been in an environment where they felt like their knowledge and experiences were being valued, and to have felt comfortable enough to approach strangers to voice their opinions and concerns, was higher for young people in the treatment group compared to the control batch. In can be said, therefore, that exposure to Agency's instruments, incentives, and resources contributes positively to young people's natural process of personal development, strengthening their community ties and ability to use their voice to enact change.

Key takeaways from learning summaries

Through a youth-centred methodology that invites young people from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to tap into their creative potential, lived experiences, knowledge, and desire to formulate and carry out social action projects, Agency is empowering individuals and communities while helping transform narratives and social representations of peripheral life and spaces. Our systematization of the program's methodology and curriculum has illustrated how the original pedagogical instruments used as the basis for active learning are centered on the promotion of skills and resources for youth empowerment and on the expansion of community learning and engagement. This approach encourages youth to take the lead in finding solutions to local social problems, by using their own potential and abilities, while also recognizing and strengthening the existing opportunities, platforms, and networks inside their communities. Working primarily with black low-income youth with limited educational and professional resources who reside in some of the most impoverished and violence-torn territories in Rio de Janeiro, Agency promotes mechanisms and pathways for young people to learn, reflect on their experiences, express themselves, amplify their voices, and become protagonists of the changes they want to see.

Providing evidence-based answers to questions around the practice of the program's abovementioned core objectives, our analysis of participant-reported skills and benefits gained has shown positive results in the domains of individual empowerment and community participation. For instance, Agency youth described having sharpened several life-skills through the program in areas such as teamwork, self-organization, argumentation and communication, decision-making, and critical thinking. They also reported having experienced a boost in their self-confidence, urban mobility, educational and employment opportunities, personal network, and entrepreneurial competencies. As for community participation, our analysis has shown a

deepening in territorial engagement, with young people increasing their involvement in different local activities, tapping into community cultural wealth,[15] and taking an active stance against favela exclusion and social stigmatization through the creation and implementation of hundreds of positive impact projects built on the foundation of local needs, experiences, resources, and knowledge.

Finally, the impact evaluation segment of our study found significant changes in aspects of youth employment, entrepreneurial and community engagement, and personal empowerment resulting from participation in the program with, for example, Agency youth being more likely to have a formal job, to have opened a business, and to have taken part in community activities in comparison to the control group. Ultimately, our study has demonstrated that Agency's youth-inclusive educational methodology of active learning is successful in setting up the grounds of praxis for meaningful youth-led processes of community change to take place. Seeking to deepen democracy and development from the margins, the program is helping form a generation of young leaders with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and increased access to opportunity structures to impact processes of socio-political change. These results shed light on the potential of youth development strategies to expand opportunities for young people's personal and professional growth while bridging processes of individual and collective empowerment through positive community representation and collective action to help fight exclusion and inequalities.

Limitations and directions for future research

Our analysis of the Agency intervention is limited to an investigation of pedagogical instruments and approaches and participant profile and experience, including pathways for individual empowerment, with a brief discussion on processes of community change to illustrate youth protagonism in entrepreneurial projects. Given that one of the most innovative aspects of the program lies in its focus on active learning for youth-led social action, beyond a systematization of the methodology and an exploration of outcomes at the individual level, it is important to better understand how projects evolve on the ground along with their limitations and opportunities in terms of fostering community transformation. This calls for an in-depth analysis of the dozens of projects developed by young people through the Agency platform since its inception, the processes of change they have set into motion, the populations they have impacted, the challenges they faced, and the results they have achieved, facilitating a discussion about Agency's long-term commitment to former participants, territorial impact, and emancipatory potential.

[15] Defined by Yosso (2005) as "an array of knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression."

As for our assessment of program outcomes at the individual level, we used both non-experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation strategies to explore capacity-building and empowerment impact. While our before-and-after analysis without a control group provides valid preliminary evidence in terms of intervention effectiveness, due to threats to internal validity known to this particular methodology, our findings are limited. In addition to insights from various complementary qualitative data sets, we have strived to minimize this limitation with results from our quasi-experimental impact valuation, although we explored a lower number of variables in comparison to the non-experimental analysis. That said, a deeper understanding of the long-term "Agency effect" would require a post-intervention assessment exploring the sustainability of some of the results found in this study. Finally, we believe that a comparative study of program implementation and outcomes across the locations where Agency is currently present (in Brazil and in the United Kingdom) would provide important lessons for the further replication and scaling up of the methodology in different countries and contexts.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Appendix

Predicted Probabilities Formal Employment and Business Entrepreneurship - Logit Model using Inverse Probability Matching (Margins)

Table 30. Percentage of participants in formal employment:

Variable	In formal employment
Pre-Control	0.070***
	(0.017)
Pre-Treatment	0.080***
	(0.018)
Post-Control	0.022**
	(0.010)
Post-Treatment	0.119***
	(0.025)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 31. Percentage of participants who opened their own business in the past 3 months:

Variable	Opened my own business
Pre-Control	0.123***
	(0.0217)
Pre-Treatment	0.0600***
	(0.0153)
Post-Control	0.115***
	(0.0221)
Post-Treatment	0.161***
	(0.0286)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 32. Percentage of participants who tried to open their own business in the past 3 months, but failed:

Variable	Tried to open a business, but failed
Pre-Control	0.125***
	(0.0219)
Pre-Treatment	0.144***
	(0.0227)
Post-Control	0.127***
	(0.0230)
Post-Treatment	0.285***
	(0.0352)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 33. Percentage of participants who engaged in activities to open a business in the past 3 months:

Variable	Engaged in activities to open a business
Pre-Control	0.210***
	(0.0270)
Pre-Treatment	0.260***

	(0.0283)
Post-Control	0.233***
	(0.0292)
Post-Treatment	0.493***
	(0.0390)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Predicted Probabilities Community Engagement - Logit Model using Inverse Probability Matching

Table 34. Percentage of participants who, in the past 3 months, met with friends/residents to discuss community problems and improvements:

Variable	Met with friends/residents
Pre-Control	0.269***
	(0.0294)
Pre-Treatment	0.230***
	(0.0272)
Post-Control	0.182***
	(0.0266)
Post-Treatment	0.341***
	(0.0369)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 35. Percentage of participants who, in the past 3 months, organized a meeting in the community:

Variable	Organized a meeting in the community
Pre-Control	0.114***
	(0.0211)
Pre-Treatment	0.0951***
	(0.0189)
Post-Control	0.0611***
	(0.0165)
Post-Treatment	0.154***
	(0.0281)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Predicted Probabilities Personal Empowerment - Ordered Logit Model using Inverse Probability Matching

Table 37. Percentage of participants who, in the last 3 months, were in an environment where they felt that their live experiences and knowledge were valued:

Variable	Experiences were valued
Pre-Control (Rarely or never)	0.225***
	(0.0227)
Pre-Treatment (Rarely or never)	0.236***
	(0.0231)
Post-Control (Rarely or never)	0.238***
	(0.0234)
Post-Treatment (Rarely or never)	0.118***
	(0.0173)

Pre-Control (Sometimes)	0.511***
	(0.0176)
Pre-Treatment (Sometimes)	0.511***
	(0.0176)
Post-Control (Sometimes)	0.510***
	(0.0177)
Post-Treatment (Sometimes)	0.458***
	(0.0240)
Pre-Control (Frequently)	0.237***
	(0.0244)
Pre-Treatment (Frequently)	0.226***
	(0.0234)
Post-Control (Frequently)	0.224***
	(0.0236)
Post-Treatment (Frequently)	0.413***
	(0.0373)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 38. Percentage of participants who, in the last 3 months, felt comfortable to approach people they did not know to discuss an idea or an issue:

Variable	Approached people
Pre-Control (Rarely or never)	0.277***
	(0.0266)
Pre-Treatment (Rarely or never)	0.287***
	(0.0273)
Post-Control (Rarely or never)	0.353***
	(0.0298)
Post-Treatment (Rarely or never)	0.160***
	(0.0219)
Pre-Control (Sometimes)	0.530***
	(0.0182)
Pre-Treatment (Sometimes)	0.528***
	(0.0184)
Post-Control (Sometimes)	0.503***
	(0.0203)
Post-Treatment (Sometimes)	0.515***
	(0.0205)
Pre-Control (Frequently)	0.193***
	(0.0217)
Pre-Treatment (Frequently)	0.185***
	(0.0213)
Post-Control (Frequently)	0.144***
	(0.0179)
Post-Treatment (Frequently)	0.325***
	(0.0334)

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1