



For a Different Today and Tomorrow

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'For a different today and tomorrow' Mural in Potosí, Ciudad Bolívar. Credit: Laura Taylor.

Written by [Laura Taylor](#), Principle Investigator of the Phase 2 project [YouthLEAD: Fostering Youth Peacebuilding Capacity in Colombia](#).

Poised on the edge of a steep hill, Gestores de Paz – Potosí [Promoters of Peace] is located in Ciudad Bolívar, an extension of the sprawling capital city Bogotá. Each Saturday, volunteer mentors gather 30-50 children ages 4 to 18 years old for a series of popular education workshops. The bright voices ring out in songs and laughter, welcoming each other, and starting the sessions with some physical activity and play.

Gestores is a social movement of children and youth working to mobilize the population for peace, through the recognition of their agency. In 2019, they selected an annual theme for their popular education sessions: knowing where you come from, to know where you are going. In partnership with the Foundation University Konrad Lorenz (FUKL) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB), the social movement of Gestores was linked with the [Museum of National Centre for Historical Memory of Colombia \(CNMH\)](#). With the support from Changing the Story (Phase 2), together, we are addressing two of the UN Sustainable Development goals (SDGs). First, we developed a series of inclusive workshops to promote SDG 4, inclusive and equitable quality education, which aimed to tackle the legacy of violence and displacement. The workshops also advanced SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies through democratic participation using arts-based methods to amplify the voice of children and young people.

Our work unfolded in the transitional period toward peace that other [Changing the Story blogs](#) have noted. In my own ten years of peace research in Colombia, watching how the people and nation respond to these changes in the conflict context is notable. During the negotiations between the government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the talk revolved around preparing for the 'post-conflict' period. Immediately after the approval of the peace agreement in 2016, the dialogue shifted to focus on a 'post-accord' period. This framing revealed the more complex understanding of the multiple, on-going conflicts with other armed groups (such as the



YouthLEAD Photo of Potosí. Credit: Laura Taylor.

National Liberation Army, ELN) as well as the on-going violence with paramilitary and narco-trafficking actors. In Northern Ireland, and other settings of protracted conflict, this shift in language reflects Kriesberg's essential concept of 'constructive conflict'. That is, conflict is an underlying social energy, it's the manifestation or use of violent means which contributes to the destructive nature that one might typically think of with the word conflict. However, when non-violent, creative, and inclusive means are used to tackle and address underlying social conflict, constructive processes and outcomes can be forged.

We are increasingly seeing this potential in the new 'transitional' phase after the FARC peace agreement in Colombia. The use of this new term exposes the raw reality of learning from over 50 years of armed conflict. The transitional period is brittle and tenuous, but focused on the horizon. The Truth Commission, Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons (UBPD) are all new bodies established in the wake of the 2016 agreement. These new institutions which have been created have longer mandates (e.g., 10 years) compared to other transitional processes throughout Latin America and the rest of the world. They offer primarily constructive, participatory and victim-centred mechanisms to begin to address past violence, while also keeping an eye on fostering future peace.

The youth in Potosí inherently understood these multiple and complex concepts of conflict and peace. Instead of only focusing on historical memory related to the armed conflict in Colombia, and the forced displaced which affected many in Ciudad Bolívar, Gestores was also focused on the how everyday life was saturated by conflict (e.g., compounded crises). They recognised the overlapping nature of environmental degradation, and the precarious situation of many of those living in Potosí.



PhotoVoice Training of Trainers with Gestores de Paz-
Potosí. Credit: Laura Taylor.



YouthLEAD participant on PhotoVoice Mission. Credit:
Laura Taylor.

YouthLEAD utilised two mechanisms of arts-based popular education – photography and murals – facilitated by local artists from the region. First, through a training of trainers approach, Andrea Melo worked with the Gestores mentors to carry-out four workshops directly with the children on the themes identified through the CNMH axes of land, water and body. Through a process of visual narration and photography, Melo and the children told stories. On the theme of body, the children worked on individual memories through 'self-portraits', then moving on to the theme of land and collective memory through a 'portrait of the land and region'. Finally, water – a fluid cross-cutting theme – focused on local peacebuilding through a photo-report on 'peace that springs from the earth'. Conversations with local leaders asked how they approach life and local leadership, aiming to contextualise and integrate the visual narration of the children within the wider community. Through this photo-report, the children and mentors articulated the ways that peace could help to address the problems affecting them and their community. Following the workshops, a mini-museum was held in Potosí so that the children could share their stories locally.



'Before': Mural site outside of daycare centre in Potosí. Credit: Laura Taylor.

Second, building on the themes, reflections and learnings from the photography sessions, the plans for a mural were developed, facilitated by Anghello Gil, a local graffiti artist. A space outside a local day care centre had been identified by Gestores, who received community approval for the mural. In two sessions with the children, Gil discussed the role of colour and concepts in a mural, along with practical drawing exercises, followed by the initial design of the mural and creating the basic forms to be painted on a larger scale.

Over the course of three Saturdays, the children painted alongside Gil and other local graffiti artists, to bring their stories to full and vibrant life under the theme 'for a different today and tomorrow.' Images from the photoreports were depicted in the mural, along with the themes that emerged, such as the importance of nature, the Sunday football sessions, and even a profile of a local dog that the children loved. Gestores had noted the need for an artistic intervention, with a lasting impact on the community, to help renovate this space as an important transit point in the community.

Now, YouthLEAD is shifting the focus from dialogues with a local audience, to national and international audiences. The project web site, archiving and disseminating the multiple visual narratives and the creation of the mural, will be launched shortly. We are collaborating with the CNMH and Gestores to bring their experiences to other regions of Colombia, including the Museum's important work in Cali. FUKL will host the launch of the mobile exhibit which emphasizes key visual narratives, including the Tree of Life and Football as Conflict Resolution. We look forward to participating in the upcoming CTS visit to Colombia in September to deepen the potential impact within Colombia, and to taking advantage of the remaining months to learn from the other projects and create deeper dialogue around the world.



Let's Paint! YouthLEAD participants of Gestores de Paz begin the community mural. Credit: Laura Taylor.



YouthLEAD PhotoVoice themes and images give 'life' to the community mural in Potosí. Credit: Laura Taylor.