

Master thesis

The impacts of transitional education on the situation and life chances of internally displaced and deprived youth

- A case study on learning circles in Soacha, Colombia

By Linda Pérez Bukåsen

The master thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as such. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

Supervisor: Oddvar Hollup

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the impact of learning circles in two different neighbourhoods in the municipality of Soacha, Colombia. Colombia holds the second largest population of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world; figures suggest that four million people have been displaced during the past 20 years (IDMC, 2008 a). The high number of IDPs has led to substantial challenges within education, health and protection. Temporary alternatives have proven necessary; the learning circles being among these. They form part of the formal education system and is labelled transitional as the students are to be transferred to a regular school at a later stage. The objective of the study has been to analyze the perceived impact of such education on the lives and life chances of displaced and deprived children between 9 and 15 years of age, with as special focus on the use and construction of social capital.

The theoretical framework employed in this thesis relates to theories of empowerment and social capital formation, both emphasizing aspects of civil participation. It is argued that good quality education has the potential to empower (Freire, 1989), protect and raise the cost of involvement in armed conflict (Dupuy, 2008) and gangs (Save the Children, 2007). Education is also considered important for building social capital (Dupuy, 2008). Further, it is argued that the marginalization that IDPs are faced with can be improved through community participation and construction of social capital (Putnam, 2000). The argument 'Empowerment is not something that can be done to people, but something that people do by and for themselves' made by Cornwell (2000) is seen as crucial in this context.

By looking closer into the perceived experience of attending learning circles and mapping levels of participation and stock of social capital in the neighbourhoods Comuna 4 and Comuna 6, interesting perspectives arose. First of all, the learning circles proved to be the entry ticket into the education system for most of the students. Lack of placements in a regular school or no money for uniforms and materials were the two main reasons for the students being outside the traditional school system. Despite the circles being a temporarily learning place, the students' level of understanding and satisfaction with the alternative methodology was high. Particularly valued was the relationship with tutors and in most cases, also their fellow students. Working together in groups focusing on friendship, problem-solving and community values surely appear to have opened the door into a different world for marginalized and often traumatized children being used to authoritarian teaching methods. Participation in independent student governments, learning circle committees and local development projects seems to have contributed to the creation of social capital within the learning circle environment.

The challenge however appear to be how to enable social capital to function and flourish in the communities surrounding the learning circles and not only on learning circle level. The role of parents is seen as vital for reaching further out, but making this a reality has proven difficult. Distrust, broken family structures and constant mobility strongly affect their commitment. I argue that lack of parental involvement is one of the obstacles for social capital becoming the empowerment tool it has the potential to be. The importance of sustainability of the learning circles was another aspect that proved to have affected perceived impact, level of trust and social capital formation among students and parents. I further argue that the existence of perverse social capital groups reduce the empowerment impact of the learning circles. Gangs and illegal armed groups both recruit students and frighten them from participating in activities outside the circles.

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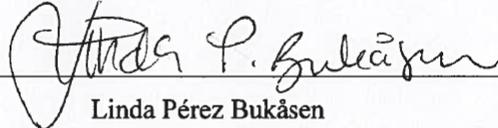
Last, but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor Oddvar Hollup for important feedback, comment and suggestions throughout the thesis process.

Declaration by candidate

I, Linda Pérez Bukåsen hereby declare that this thesis:

The impacts of transitional education on the situation and life chances of internally displaced and deprived youth - A case study on learning circles in Soacha, Colombia

has not been submitted to any other universities than Agder University for any type of academic degree.


Linda Pérez Bukåsen

24/5 2009
Date

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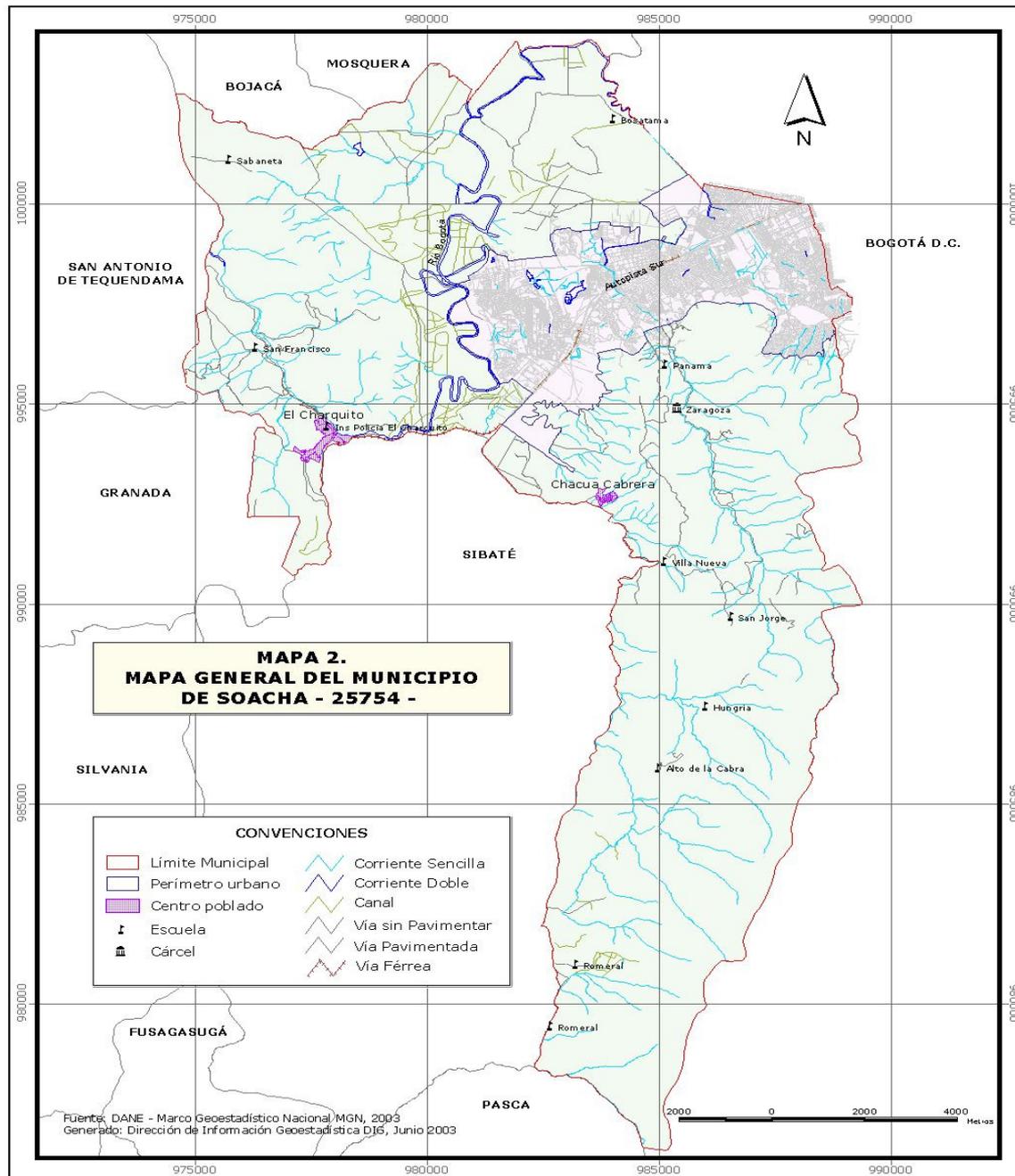
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Map on internal displacement in Colombia



Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre a (2008)

Map of the municipality of Soacha



Ma: Soacha. From Soacha - Para vivir mejor, Socio-economic plan for the Municipality of Soacha

http://74.125.77.132/search?q=cache:Q3KfZAHih_wJ:www.minambiente.gov.co/documentos/Plan_de_desarrollo_Soacha_2008_2011.doc+perfil+socio+economico+Comuna+6+soacha&hl=no&ct=clnk&cd=6&gl=no; accessed 6 March 2009

List of abbreviations

AUC: United Self Defence Groups of Colombia

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

CID: Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo

DANE: National department of Statistics in Colombia

ELN: Colombian National Liberation Army

FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

IDP: Internally displaced person

IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

OCHA: United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs

PRIO: The International Peace Research Institute in Oslo

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 Introduction and the Colombian context

PART 1: Introduction



PHOTO: Linda Pérez, Bukâsen

1.1 Rationale for the study

Despite that the number of armed conflicts has declined over the past few years the amount of refugees world wide is increasing. The total number of refugees is estimated to be 42 million people. Of these, 26 million are internally displaced people (IDPs) (Flyktinghjelpen, 2008 a). Half of all the IDPs are below the age of 18 (Watchlist, 2004). Children and youth are particularly vulnerable to displacement as being uprooted often leads to a breakdown of family and community structures. One of the challenges that they are faced with is access to safe and good quality education. Displacement in the middle of the academic school year, loss of diplomas and identification papers, the cost of uniforms and lack of placements at nearby schools due to high influx of other IDPs are just some of the constraints for ensuring that their right to education is fulfilled (Save the Children Alliance, 2007).

In Colombia, the world's second largest producer of IDPs, one way of meeting the need for educational alternatives has been through the creation of learning circles. Through this flexible model, thousands of IDPs and other out-of-school children are given the opportunity to enter the community based learning facilities any time during the formal school year. They are taught in small groups by mainly young tutors with a model quite unusual compared with what you meet in a traditional Colombian classroom (Rojas, 2008). The children are given tasks relevant for their daily lives both individually and in group. Focus on values such as friendship, collaboration and responsibility is given high priority. The learning circles used to be a non-formal educational offer, but the model is now integrated into the formal education system through a joint project between NGOs, universities and the educational authorities. When starting in a learning circle, the student is guaranteed placement in a normal, public

school nearby called mother school when the period in the learning circle is over. The learning circles are therefore to be considered a *transitional* education offer. Evaluations and studies (Gallego, 2006, Hjarrand, 2008) indicate that these circles do improve access for out-of-school children and ensure transference to a regular mother school at a later stage. When tested in a mother school, their average academic achievements are in several subjects such as mathematics and language (Ayala, 2008) higher than those of their fellow students.

But the learning circles have other functions than getting the children back to school. By giving emphasis to values, non-violent conflict resolution, collaboration and building social networks both within the learning circles and between the learning circles and the communities, the children's learning process is given an additional dimension that is interesting to look at. Given the strong focus on development of social skills and the role of the learning circle as two-way bridge between the student and the community (Ayala, 2008), I wanted to look closer into the perceived impact of the learning circles with a special focus on the use and construction of social capital.

1.2 Introduction to topic and research area

Next to Sudan, Colombia holds the highest amount of internally displaced people in the world. Accumulated estimates presented by the Colombian human rights organization for displaced people, CODHES (Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento), indicate that as many as 4 million people have been forced to leave their homes and land behind during the past two decades (IDMC a and b, 2008). The Colombian government however, did by October 2007 only recognize 2,213 000 million of these. Among the reasons for this is the fact that IDPs could only register their status as IDPs in public registers from year 2000. This mismatch between official numbers and the actual amount of refugees has left many Colombian IDPs outside national programs meant to address their needs (Refugees International, 2008). One of the consequences is that they do not receive financial and legal assistance. Another issue is that many IDPs lack access to primary and secondary education. Even though the Millennium Development goal number 2 is universal, primary education for all boys and girls within 2015 (UN, 2000), 37 million children in countries affected by armed conflict are not in school (Redd Barna, 2008). Thousands of these children live in Colombia.

According to the Colombian Constitution, children have the right to access free, basic education covering grades 1-9 with equal opportunities and without discrimination, and education is compulsory. As a response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Colombian Government seeks to reach 100 per cent gross coverage for basic education and 93 per cent coverage for middle-level education (10-11 grades) by 2015. Despite these goals, numbers from National Ministry of Education stated that only 114,044 students living in forced displacement were registered in education. If we compare this figure with the total IDP student population between the age of 5 and 17 which was 36 per cent of the total number of IDPs that year, as many as 74, 5 per cent of displaced children did not have formal access to education (Save the Children Alliance, 2007:6). As the number of IDPs increased by 320,000 new IDPs only in 2007 (IDMC b, 2008), there are strong reasons to believe that the Colombian government faces even higher challenges in reaching their MDGs today.

As a result of this, educational alternatives play an increasingly important role for internally displaced children and youth. One of these alternatives is transitional education projects like learning circles which aims to get out of school children in marginalized areas, often with high levels of displacement, back into the school system. In collaboration with a mother

school or educational centre, the children are transferred into the regular education system at a later stage. Such learning circles are mostly organized as a joint project between the Colombian teaching authorities, national and local partners of which many are funded or supported in other ways by international NGOs like the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Despite its unusual approaches and difference in methodology compared to the traditional educational system in Colombia, the learning circles are now considered a part of the *formal* education system (Rojas; Ayala; Rivera, 2008). The main reason for this is the close collaboration with Colombian authorities and the mother school which will receive the student when he or she has gained the necessary knowledge and is ready to proceed into the normal system again. Enrolment is normally done at certain dates of the year, for instance at the beginning of a new term. Important aspects of the learning circles are that they offer flexible models targeting some of the particular needs of the IDPs. The learning circles offer flexible hours and allow the students to enter any time a year without considering the formal academic year. Teaching is located near where the IDPs live, for example in a community house or culture centre. The teaching is carried out in small groups, and the tutors are often young people from the community or the municipality studying at the university. Knowledge is developed through educational projects where the students construct their learning in a collective way, embarking from who they are, and what their role and the role of their family can play in the community (CNR, no date).

As for geographical area of study, I chose a municipality outside Bogotá called Soacha as it is one of the municipalities with the highest densities of IDPs in the country (Jacobsen and Howe, 2008). I ended up looking at the impact of leaning circles in two different neighbourhoods operated by two different implanting partners of the Norwegian Refugee Council: In Comuna 4 I looked at the learning circles operated by Fundación Escuela Nueva Volvamos a la gente and in Comuna 6, I looked at the circles operated by Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo.

1.3 Motivation for the research

I 1998, I spent six months as an international observer for returned and repatriated refugees in a village in the rural areas of Ixcán in Guatemala. The majority of these refugees fled to Mexico in 1982 as a result of a massacre carried out by the government army as a counter-guerrilla attack (Falla, 1992). But some of the community members stayed in the area and lived a life hiding from the conflicting parties. For 12 years the IDPs cooked their food at night so that no one should be able to trace them because of the smoke from their fire places. For 12 years they taught their children to read and write while hiding in the rain forest. When what was to become my best friend in the village - Reina - was 11 years old she came back to her parent's village without knowing any other way of life than hiding from those in uniform. When I got to know her she was 15 and had three jobs that needed to be taken care of before she could pay attention to her studies: housework, attending the family's tiny store and serve time at the community radio. Her day started at three o' clock in the morning and seldom finished before ten at night. When she was attending the store, the radio was always on, and on her side were her books. She was in junior high school, but did not have a class room to attend or a teacher to consult. Her teacher was a voice in the radio, and her hope was that if she ever was to finish high school her father let her go study for real in one of the larger towns.

The story of Reina in Guatemala is far from unique, she is only one of many the formerly internally displaced around the world. What makes her story different is her community's

ability to organize common survival efforts through use of social capital, and her family's ability to prioritize education in an almost impossible situation. To me this is an example of the power of education - not only as a tool, but as a symbol of hope strengthening the will to change and endure a difficult situation. A country experiencing a perhaps even more complex internal conflict in Latin-America is Colombia. Ever since I returned from Guatemala, the ongoing conflict in Colombia and similar patterns of repression and abuse have gained my attention. Since 1999 I have been working with human rights issues through different organizations working with Colombia. For several years I have had an intention of doing field work on the situation of the internally displaced people in this country. Ten years of work experience from organizations like Save the Children and Amnesty International has fuelled my motivation and given me a number of ideas on what to look at. The ongoing Save the Children-campaign 'Rewrite the Future' was what eventually made me make up my mind. The organization aims to provide access to good and relevant education for 8 million children in war affected countries by 2010. Colombia is one of these countries. As providing education to IDPs often is a result of joint collaboration between the government, United Nations organizations, national and international NGOs and local communities there are a wide range of interesting levels and initiatives to look at. I have chosen to focus on implementation on community level, and seek to combine related theories of empowerment and mobilization of social capital to my topic and area of study. I ended up studying the impact of learning circles in two neighbourhoods outside Bogotá supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council.

1.4 Research problem, objectives and questions

Education is by scholars such as Freire (1989) considered having a substantial empowerment potential for marginalized people. Good quality education is meant to provide children with knowledge, life skills and hope for the future (Redd Barna, 2008), and has the potential of protecting children and contribute to peace, for instance by raising the social cost of engaging in the conflict or in criminal activities (Dupuy, 2008). Education is also considered vital in order to reach the other Millennium Development Goals relevant for the fulfilment and protection of children's rights such as ending poverty, ensuring gender equality and improving child and maternal health (UN, 2000). But how do the young people being targeted by national and international NGOs experience the interventions? Are they considered to have the anticipated impact? What are the limitations and constraints of these interventions? Are there any unutilized opportunities or unforeseen threats related to use and construction of social capital in the IDP-dominated neighbourhood?

Another aspect of what I intend to study is participation and use and construction of social capital. One of Save the Children's working principles is child participation. When studying the nature and degree of participation emerging from the learning circles, I seek to investigate if there is a relationship between attending and participating in other activities related to transitional education, and empowerment of young IDPs. As I wrote in the introduction, Colombian IDPs have a right to primary education both according to global conventions and national. The government has also set a target of 93 per cent secondary education enrolment by 2015. Questions like whether the learning circles actually has a significant impact on access for the students, and if the increased knowledge, self esteem and development of social and participation skills empowers the young IDPs so they can make effective choice improving their own lives are questions I hoped to get answers to before went to Colombia to conduct my fieldwork.

After a long process of reading, discussion and eliminating alternative approaches, I decided that the **main objective** of my research was to *assess to what extent learning circles are enabling young IDPs to improve their situation and life chances, and if social capital, particularly among the young IDPs, is used or constructed through attendance and other engagement in learning circles.*

Sub-objectives enabling me to reach the main objective of the research have been to:

- To assess the perceived benefits, limitations and alternatives to learning circles among young IDPs without access to the formal education system
- To investigate how forces within social capital affect the impact of the learning circles
- To identify if young IDPs are empowered by the learning circles and look into which role use and construction of social capital plays in this process

The **research problem** identified for my thesis is thus as follows:

What are the impacts of learning circles on the situation and life chances of internally displaced youths in Soacha, Colombia?

The concept of empowerment has been studied with emphasis on the perceived benefits and outcome of the learning circles. Empowerment has to a certain degree also been analyzed with regard to mobilization of social capital integrating the learning circles into the community, and the effect the learning opportunity is perceived to have for the social capital among the youth in the community. This way I have investigated if there are relationship between the learning circles, use and construction of social capital and empowerment.

Research questions

1. Why do young IDPs drop out from the regular education system? What are their reasons for not entering formal education?
2. What are considered alternatives to attending learning circles?
3. What are perceived as the benefits from attending learning circles?
4. Have the young IDPs attending learning circles experienced changes in their own attitudes, behaviour and achievements?
5. What are considered the limitations and challenges with learning circles?
6. To what degree and in what manner are young IDPs involved making the learning circles and integrated part of the community?
7. What kind of social networks and local institutions are the young IDPs involved in?

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized in six different chapters. The first chapter covers introduction to the study, the Colombian context and the specific research area. Chapter two introduces central concepts of internal displacement, presents relevant groups of youth and identifies the main actors in the conflict. In chapter three, I present the theoretical framework and literature review that the thesis is based upon. Chapter four explains choice and use of methodology, while empirical findings from the field work carried out in Soacha is presented in chapter five. The last chapter, number six, is dedicated discussion, analysis and presentation of key findings.

PART 2: The Colombian context and research area

1.5 Geography and demographics

Colombia is a country with extensive coastline, high Andean mountains, lowland plains and large areas covered with rainforest. The country is rich in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron, gold, emeralds, copper and hydropower (CIA Factbook, 2008), and is the third largest producer of coffee in the world (Dow Jones Newswire, 2009). However, the resources are unevenly distributed, and despite that Colombia is regarded a medium developed country ranking 75 out of 177 in the Human Development Report (2007/2008) which has been able to reduce poverty and unemployment rates between 2002 and 2008 (CIA Factbook, 2009), 17, 8 % of the population lives with less than 2 dollars a day and 7 % with less than one dollar a day (World Bank, 2008). One of the country's greatest challenges is the ongoing conflict that has lasted for more than four decades, and a violent past prior to the internal conflict (Amnesty International, 2008).

It is said that the three colours of the flag hold three very distinctive characteristics marking the countries' past and present: The colour of blue represents the oceans surrounding 3,208 km² of the country, the colour of yellow symbolizes the abundance of gold and the red all the blood that has been shed for the sake of grief on one side and marginalization and frustration on the other. Colombia has five neighbouring countries: Panama to north-west, Venezuela and Brazil to the east and Peru and Ecuador to the south (CIA Factbook, 2008). By July 2008 the country had 45,013,674 inhabitants. 29, 4 per cent or approximately 13 million people are younger than 15 years old.

The Colombian population descend from three different racial groups; white, black and indigenous (USLC, 1988). Even though the national census no longer use race as a reference point; ancestry, physical appearance and socio-cultural status is important for how Colombians look at themselves and others (ibid). The largest part of the population, 58 per cent, is a mix of European and indigenous people, and is referred to as *mestizo*. 20 per cent are white; often called *criollos*, 14 per cent are mulattos; a mix of Europeans and Afro-Colombians, four per cent are Afro-Colombians and the remaining three per cent are indigenous (CIA Factbook, 2008, USCL, 1988).

The different ethnical groups traditionally lived in different parts of the country and reflected the social system introduced by the Spaniards. Almost two hundred years after its independence, the marks after centuries of colonialism are still visible in the hierarchical organization of the Colombian society. The country is still dominated by the white population as most of the wealthy economical and political elite are comprised by them (USCL, 1988). Due to its high share of mestizo among the total population, it is not surprising that many of the IDPs are of mixed decent. What is interesting though is that despite that the indigenous and Afro-Colombian population only comprise of 7-8 per cent of the total population, one third of the internally displaced belong to these minorities (Flyktninghjelpen, 2003). Traditionally, the population of white people was concentrated around the cities, especially Bogotá, whereas the mestizo population, mostly peasants, lived in the highlands. From 1940s and onward, the mestizo population started moving to the urban areas and became part of the working class or urban poor (USLC, 1988). Even though this also happened with parts of the

mulatto and Afro-Colombian population, these two groups stayed to a greater extent along the coast and in the lowlands, whereas the indigenous population was found in remote areas of the highlands, the Amazon rain forest and in the Guajira peninsula (ibid). The more than four decade long conflict and four million displaced people have contributed to a change in this pattern. According to the map provided by Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (see page v) more than 20 of the 32 departments have a significant number of internally displaced people (IDMC, 2008).

1.6 Historical overview and the origins of the conflict

Colombia became independent from Spain 20 July 1810. After decades of different unions with neighbouring countries, Colombia finally became known as the Republic of Colombia in 1886. By the end of the century, Liberals and Conservatives engaged in a thousand day long civil war that resulted in the separation from Panama (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008). Political tensions continued, and after the assassination of the liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, who questioned the power structure of both the Liberals and Conservatives, violence broke out again in April 1948 (IDMC, 2008). The political tension following the assassination led to the riots called *El Bogotazo* which resulted in 2,000 deaths marking the beginning of an 18 year long period referred to as *La Violencia* (the violence) that is estimated to have claimed more than 200,000 lives (Manwaring, 2002). The political crises ended with a political agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties to take turns in sharing the power. These political changes did however not address the underlying social discontent that was triggered by the assassination of Gaitan nor did it end the violence. In addition, this agreement made it difficult for other political parties to play an actual role in the society. The killings during *La Violencia*, political repression and rural violence conducted by the elite forcing farmers to leave their homes and land, were among the reasons leading to the emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1960s (IDMC, 2008). Since 1966 there has been a conflict between guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups and the government army.

The 43 year long conflict is regarded as the longest ongoing internal conflict in the world (Uppsala University, 2007). An often used definition of 'civil war' is that more than 1000 people are killed in combat annually (Small and Singer, 1982), and by measuring the conflict by this number, the conflict in Colombia reached the intensity level of civil war in 2001. Since then - with the exception of 2003 - the conflict has intensified causing more than 1,000 battle related deaths a year (University of Uppsala, 2007). But there are other aspects that should be considered, for instance that the country is not divided along supporters of the main warring factions (Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas, 2003). According to Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas, the Colombian conflict is a 'contest for political power of long duration and low density', adding that the conflict has particular features that distinguish it from others: It lacks the classical ethnical, regional or religious differences that often define an internal conflict. 90 per cent of the population is Roman Catholics and there is no militant minority in terms of race or ethnicity (ibid). Looking closer at Colombia as a class society however, where the wealthy and dominant elite is predominantly white (USLC, 1988) and the Afro-Colombians and indigenous people are being more exposed to displacement (Flyktninghjelpen, 2003), there is an ethnical aspect present even though it is linked to the power structures and who are among the victims of the internal conflict rather than defining the different groups fighting each other. Another aspect of the Colombian conflict highlighted by Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas, is related to the Colombian democracy and its political institutions. The democracy has been among the most stable in Latin-America, being ruled by a dictator only once the last century. The Constitution, national laws and commitment to international treaties and

conventions lay the foundations of a well functioning society, but as in the case of IDPs, there is not a match between civil rights and the government's ability and will to ensure its compliance. This has been particularly the case in rural areas (Global IDP Project, 2003), where lack of institutional presence has fuelled discontent enabling for the insurgent groups to gain popular support on one hand, and left the civilians unprotected, caught in the middle of the conflict on the other hand (ibid). Even though most are doing their best to not take part in the conflict, they are dragged into it for various reasons. Their piece of land can be part a warring territory or wanted for production of drugs. Their economical or political support in favour in one of the conflicting parties could be crucial determining who is in control. Self-declared peace communities are under attack; they are many places not allowed to not participate in the conflict. So even those who actively organize themselves in order to stay out of the conflict, are threatened, killed and forced to take side or leave (Amnesty International, 2009).

1.6.1 The guerrillas and the paramilitaries

The main insurgent groups have been the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – ELN). In reaction to their growth, the powerful elite and land owners encouraged the development of paramilitaries in order to fight the guerrilla in areas of the country where these were dominating. The paramilitary umbrella organization United self-defence forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia - AUC) was established in 1997, but paramilitary groups have existed since a law allowing the creation of self-defence groups was passed in the late 1960s. Some of the paramilitary groups were developed locally; others were formed by local politicians, land owners and drug lords. The paramilitary groups were established in order to protect interests such as land or a political office, and the majority was ideologically based upon a counter-guerrilla ideology. Even though the paramilitary's enemy was guerrilla groups like FARC and ELN, many civilians have been targeted in stead of protected by the self defence groups (CFR, 2009). Some consider this a strategy to deprive peasants from their land, others to frighten people from supporting the leftist guerrilla (Molano, 2001). Historically, the paramilitaries have been accused for being responsible for the majority of massacres, selective killings and disappearances (Amnesty International, 2008), important reasons behind the massive displacement in Colombia the past 20 years. The conflict between paramilitaries and guerrilla groups became worse through an increase in the illegal drug trade, and both actors' close connection to production and trafficking of drugs make people question how much is left of ideology and how much is a result of it being a lucrative source of income (CFR, 2009).

1.6.2 Demobilization and “para politics”

The current president, Alvaro Uribe, entered office in 2002 promising to fight the armed groups both to the left and to the right. In 2004 the government intensified the military offensive against the guerrillas through *Plan Patriota* (the Patriot Plan). When government troops carried out "Patriot-Plan-activities" in FARC dominated areas in Caquetá, Putumayo and Guaviare provinces in southern Colombia, FARC responded with counter-attacks in neighbouring provinces, to take some pressure off their key areas.

The paramilitary umbrella organization AUC declared cease fire in 2002 followed by a demobilization process initiated 31 December 2005 (University of Uppsala, 2008). The same year the Peace and Justice Law, a legal framework for demobilization of armed groups, had

been passed in Congress. This law was questioned since paramilitaries were pardoned of serious crimes of violations of human rights (Amnesty, 2008). The negotiations between AUC and the government were also questioned by the FARC and ELN guerrillas because they did not see that there was ever a conflict between the two parties. Even though the paramilitaries and the army sometimes fought each other, AUC did never claim governmental or territorial power (University of Uppsala, 2008). On the contrary, paramilitary groups were accused for having being backed by the Colombian army (Amnesty, 2008), and in 2007, the country was shaken by what is referred to as a *para-political* scandal as close connections between the government and paramilitary groups were revealed (Brodzinsky, 2008). Uribe was re-elected in 2006 after the constitution was amended to allow a second term. A petition for allowing Uribe to run for a third four-year period was signed by four million Colombians in 2008, and if it is passed in Congress, he might be running again in 2010, (Mance, 2009)

As for the formal demobilization of the 32,500 right wing paramilitary groups in 2006, many of them have joined new criminal groups which now possess control over areas used for production, refinement, and transport of coca and cocaine (University of Uppsala, 2008).

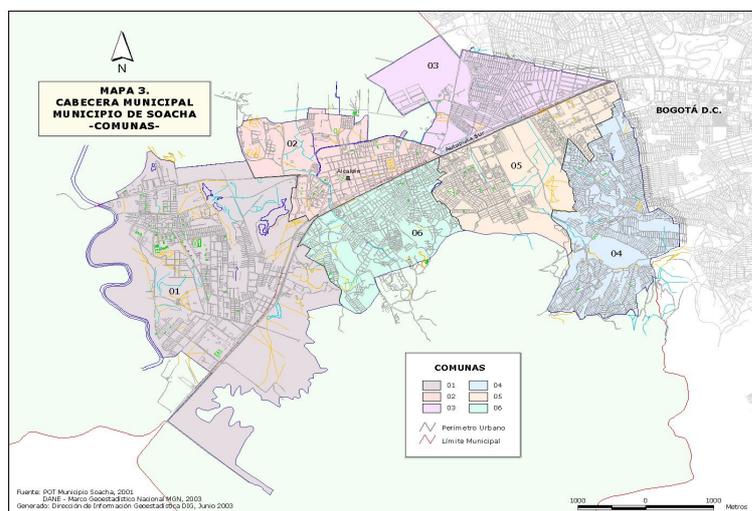
1.7 An introduction to the research area

1.7.1 The municipality of Soacha

Soacha is situated southern part of the plains of Bogotá at an altitude of 2600 meters above sea level. The municipality borders to Ciudad Bolívar in Bogotá to the west, Granada and San Antonio del Tequendama to the east, Bojacá and Mosquera to the north and Sibaté and Pasca to the south. The urban area of Soacha covers 17 square kilometres and consists of six sectors – *comunas* - with a total of 348 neighbourhoods – *barrios* - of which 82 are not legally recognized (OCHA, 2006). According to a census from the national department of statistics in Colombia (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística – DANE) in 2005, the number of children between 0 and 14 years of age was 119,628; among these 40,704 were children and youth between 7 and 18 years from sectors with high economic, social and cultural vulnerability (Tarquino, 2008). Of the total population in Soacha, 26, 1 % is between 13 and 26 years old and categorized as ‘youth’. Recent government and UN assessments (OCHA, 2006, Garzón, 2005, Tarquino, 2008) indicate that the sectors four and six are considered the most vulnerable and hold the highest IDP-population in the municipality. As I carried out my fieldwork in Comuna 4, a part of the sector four in Altos de Cazuca and Comuna 6, situated in sector six, both of the most critical sectors are represented in the area of my fieldwork. When DANE carried out an experimental and comprehensive census in 2003, 363 019 people forming part of 89 333 families lived in Soacha, most of these in the urban areas. Considering the constant flux of forcibly displaced people and other migrants from different parts of Colombia, it is reasonable to assume that this figure is even higher today. Between 1993 and 2003, the number of inhabitants increased by 58 % and the number of families by 65 % (DANE; 2003). The population density increased too, from 933 persons per square kilometres in 1993 to 1941 persons in 2003. The highest population density is found in the two sectors where I conducted my fieldwork.

In 2005, 119,870 persons (30, 1 % of the population) were registered at some kind of public or private educational institution. But among youth between 13 and 26 years of age, 54 % do not attend any educational institution. Following the figures from the DANE 2005 census,

18, 5 % of under age youth are excluded from the school system. As for quality in the education, the quality offered does not satisfy the requirements needed for the youth to successfully enter the job market. The quality is also affected by poor communication and inter-generational conflicts between students, teachers and the school administration. Lack of placements, equipment and low standard of school buildings and recreational areas are other problems reducing the education quality (Tarquino, 2008). In a UN-assessment carried out in 2006, approximately 83, 4 per cent of the population in sector four is displaced; and few of those are among the 20 % in the area who has access to infrastructure ensuring basic services such as potable water and an adequate sewage system. In addition to having poor living conditions, the inhabitants of sector four are living in neighbourhoods with high levels of social conflict and low level of government instructional presence. Illegal armed groups maintain high influence in the area, worsening the situation for the internally displaced (OCHA, 2006). Their presence contributes to higher violence and crime rates recruiting youth, threatening people and imposing curfew at night. Youth are considered especially vulnerable due to lack of educational and labour opportunities, many of them see few alternatives to engage in criminal activities or join illegal, armed groups. The number of young people between 14 and 22 years being killed is high (OCHA, 2006, Maloney, 2008).



Map of Soacha's sectors (Tarquino, 2008)

1.7.2 Learning circles in Soacha

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has been active in Colombia since 1996 (NRC, 2007). The organization addresses some of the principle challenges of IDPs working with legal counselling, education and advocacy. NRC is no longer financing the implementation of the learning circles in Soacha directly, but provides technical assistance. After my initial meetings with programme staff at the NRC office in Bogotá, I was encouraged to contact two national NGOs and operators of learning circles in Soacha in order to select two communities where I could conduct my study: Escuela Nueva Foundation and Cooperación Infancia y Desarrollo.

Escuela Nueva Foundation and the Escuela Nueva educacional model

The Escuela Nueva Foundation (Fundación Escuela Nueva Volvamos a la gente) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1987 by the authors and creators of the Escuela Nueva educational model. They seek to improve the quality, efficiency and sustainability of basic education in developing countries through the Escuela Nueva model and public-private

partnerships (Escuela Nueva Foundation, 2009a). The Escuela Nueva model (literarily “New school”) was developed in 1975 and is a child-centered, community-based led by teachers who are facilitators for active, participatory and cooperative learning (Escuela Nueva Foundation 2009 b). According to programme manager Gloria Ayala (2008), the model responds to some of the very key challenges that many of the IDP-dominated neighbourhoods in Colombia are faced with: Poor educational infrastructure, inadequate resources, high teacher turnover, high repetition and drop out rates, and low academic achievement. The educational programs are based on an innovative curriculum, teacher training, community empowerment and school and classroom management. Implemented together, these components are meant to create a synergy between children, families, community and the school to improve the quality and efficacy of education (Escuela Nueva Foundation 2009 b). The methodology is applied in multi-grade class rooms, conventional grade schools and unconventional educational settings such as in the neighbourhoods that I have studied with a high number of IDPs, out of school children and other particularly vulnerable children.

In Colombia, the application of the Escuela Nueva model in learning circles is, after several years of less formal operations throughout the country, done within the framework of the formal education system. The inability of the traditional schools to absorb all the students that move or are displaced throughout the year, and respond to their special need has resulted in a public-private collaboration where the learning circles is filling the gap and providing a transitional education offer. In Colombia, there are almost 500 learning circles in 28-30 municipalities in a total of 14 departments and seeks to prepare children and youth from 1. – 5th grade. The learning circles were developed to meet the needs of a population in extreme vulnerability and emergency. The education costs (uniforms, transport, fees) and inflexibility in start up-dates and requirement of presence and continuity did not fit very well with the reality that many of the IDP and other out of school children were living in. Their schooling process has been ruptured, and they have missed everything: their home, family members, land and social network. They live in marginalized areas with high level of poverty, unemployment and violence. Many have been rejected by the system; others have to work or have to look after brothers and sisters or even their own children. The fact that they move a lot around, even in the Soacha/Bogota area, affects the traditional school systems’ ability to give them an offer at all. The philosophy is to respect every child and show respect to the time they are allowed to invest in their schooling. “To establish a routine is the ideal, but we never reject anyone” (Ayala, 2008).

Methodology and pedagogy in the learning circles

Socialization is considered a vital part of the learning methodology and one way of contributing to this process is by having student governments and to invite all students to participate in thematic committees related to e. g communication, environmental protection, health and hygiene (Ayala, 2008). Their strategy is to prepare the IDPs and other vulnerable out-of-school children for going back to the society, healing some of the wounds and increasing their self esteem and ability to interact with others. An ideal learning circle has 10-12 children and their tutors (not teachers) are mostly young, often between 17 and 24 years old, and preferably from the neighbourhood or nearby areas. They need to either be studying at the university or at least have finished high school. The tutor’s role is to facilitate for an interactive, inclusive and child-centered learning process. The teaching is often done in public community owned spaces such as cultural or activity houses, but in some cases houses are rented.

The pedagogy is created around learning guides in stead of traditional school books

These guides give the students an opportunity to create their own rhythm and making it possible to be absent without missing out important knowledge. Even though the parents are encouraged to prioritize schooling, their life situation might require that their children have to attend to chores at home from time to time, for instance looking after their sisters or brothers. The guides focus on situations and problems related to their daily lives, and a great part of the work is done in groups. The students are given a lot of autonomy in choosing how to approach a task or solve a problem. Representatives for the student government and committees it is decided democratically among the students themselves. According to several of my sources, this is not always the case in a traditional school where the administration and teachers might directly or indirectly lobby for the election of preferred students. The students register their presence and absence themselves, showing them trust and giving them the responsibility. All students create a friendship-mail box where they can place small notes or letters after having an argument or whenever they would like to share or encourage one of the other students in their circle.

The pedagogy emphasize human values that might be lost or less visible in the lives of the IDPs and other our of school children attending the circle. Walls are filled with words like love, peace, friendship, tolerance and non-violence. The *comedor* in Comuna 4 states “Teach with love”, whereas the walls of the Comuna 6 *comedor* is packed with Whinny the Poo and other posters expressing words of wisdom related to the very same values. The values are incorporated in the learning of materials which are divided into writing, language, social studies, natural studies and cross-cutting themes such as democracy, non-violent conflict resolution and environmental protection. Every circle also has a travelling notebook (Cuaderno viajero) which literally goes from home to home, including their parents in their learning processes. In this book, their parents are asked to write down something about themselves, for instance a childhood memory for their place of origin or a presentation of who they are and how and they are doing now. The content of the travelling notebook belongs to everyone in the circle. The circles also have learning corner (Rincón de Aprendizaje) with toys and tools that is explored and used in relation to tasks. The approach is divided into three steps:

1. **Internal:** The child makes a question departing from the knowledge he or she currently has. The guides invite the child to get to know and learn, for instance in the learning corner or the library.
2. **Group work:** Through sharing personal experiences or expressing feelings, writing, playing or drawing, the children learn to work in group.
3. **Applying the knowledge:** The child asks him or herself how they can use their new knowledge in their daily life. This is often done as homework together with an adult.

The last part is seen as crucial (Ayala, 2008). This way the world is starting to make sense again, strengthening their self esteem and self determination. But the organization emphasizes the importance of the parents and adult caretakers: “This is not possible without a very direct and specific contact with the parents. The most difficult child is the lonely child”.

Organization in the field

The local team is comprised of a tutor (responsible for up to approximately 15 children), pedagogical advisors and psychosocial or communitarian advisors. The pedagogical advisor is supposed to supervise the tutors so that they can manage critical situations by being collaborative, participative, therapeutic and applying an active pedagogy. The pedagogical advisor and psychosocial advisor are responsible for eight learning circles.

According to Ayala (2008), the commitments from the mother schools need to be strengthened. They have an obligation, but they are not made and fully prepared to attend to needs of children in crisis. They need to be more aware of their responsibility and really accept the child, both in theory and practice. For instance, the children and the response to their presence and needs must, according the organization to be integrated in the school project, plans and curricula. The head master of the mother school should also monitor and follow up the learning circles in order to know more about how these work and who are the children that will eventually start at their school. There should also be more contact between the mother school and the learning circles before the children are transferred, for instance through participation in joint activities such as celebrations and other events. “We have to make sure that these children, step by step, are falling in love with their school to be”.

The tutors meet regularly in micro centres where share problems and experiences and look for solutions. Before they start working as tutors, they are receive several sessions of training preparing them for the specific community where they will work in addition to training in the methodology, pedagogy. After working for a while, the tutors are given workshops responding to their expressed needs, often expressed in the micro centres. The field coordinator and other staff are following up the tutors and the circles with frequent field visits.

Alliances and social networks in the communities

The learning process of a child is not taking place in isolation. Providing access to health services and assistance in approaching registers and official offices (mostly to their parents) in e. g legal matters is viewed as an extensive service is considered important to ensure the schooling of the students. In Soacha, Fundación Escuela Nueva works with, as in every area where they implement learning circles, the local educational authorities (Secretaría de Educación), the mother school and universities as well as other public institutions present in the municipality, primarily within health and social welfare. They also work together with the Human Rights Ombudsman’s office (Defensoría del Pueblo) and the social family welfare authorities (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) and UNHCR. Local partners in Comuna 4 are Corporation Sumase (audiovisual projects), Diaconí, Casa de Derechos (Human Rights House) and several universities. Grass root organizations and local leaders are important partners as they through them seek to establish a *junta* for local action (Junta de Acción Local) prior to and during the implementation of the learning circles (Personal conversation with field staff). Other important partners are the parents, who are targeted through home visits, workshops and involvement in parent groups, committees and eventually parent governments. In Comuna 4 they have established a group of leadership, coordination and multiplication which consists of four parents: One being the representative and the three others taking turns (rotating) one being secretary, a second responsible for activities and the third “animador”, keeping up the spirit within the group (Personal conversation with field staff). Direct activities which involve parents on project level are the school herb garden and the chicken project. When I arrived, the project coordinator was in a process of setting up a parent committee for taking care of the chickens when in the summer holiday from late November until February.

Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo

Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo (CID) is a national, non-governmental development organization which primarily works with communities with high levels of poverty and vulnerability and/or affected by forced displacement (CID, no date). The organization has an interdisciplinary approach and works with community based and institutionalized teaching actors and governmental and non-governmental social organizations. Focus is on direct assistance, training and development of best practises and lessons learned (ibid).

In 2006, UNHCR, Escuela Nueva Foundation and the Department of Education in Soacha contacted CID as they needed another implementing partner with experience with internally displaced and flexible educational projects. According to Gallego (2008), CID was asked to operate five-six learning circles in Soacha where these had been suspended. This meant that a lot of the framework was already set: They were to implement the methodology and use the model already developed for the learning circles. I will therefore not repeat all aspects of how they operate. Rather, I will give an overview over aspects that they raised during the interviews I carried out both at the office in Bogotá and with field coordinator and pedagogical advisor in the field. When the organization started their work, the children had been two month outside the learning circle system. The team of tutors had left, and they had to go from door to door to identify the out of school children, talk to parents and take up to contact with the mother school again. In 2006, five learning circles were reborn. Today there are 491 learning circles all over Colombia, operated by some 7 national organizations and institutions, CID and Escuela Nueva being two of those.

Re-starting a learning circle

First, vulnerable communities with high rates of displacement are identified. The process of establishing a new learning circle goes from employing tutors, coordinator and advisor to make a work plan where identifying community leaders is one of the entry strategies. The community leaders often know who are displaced or highly vulnerable and in need of education. Other sources of identifying the students is contacting the government body targeting the IDPs, figures from the municipality, hospital, health clinic and not to forget the schools. They often have waiting lists and the names of those they had to reject because of lack of placement or because they came throughout the academic year. CID also utilizes speakers and pamphlets in addition to visiting the children and their families in their homes. The last approach is seen as fundamental as without the parents' interest, trust and support, the chance they will send their children to the circle (in some cases for the second time) is much lower (Rivera, 2008). CID places much emphasis on the quality of the teaching locations. Until 2006, little focus was given to the physical teaching environment. CID wanted to change that as this part is seen as a crucial part of the learning experience. Good ventilation and bathrooms were installed, and the walls were painted and neatly decorated. Comfortable chairs and a good selection of quality books meeting the requirements given to a regular school were distributed throughout the learning circles. Their view was supported by the education programme manager at Norwegian Refugee Council when he, referring to several quality aspects of a students schooling stated "We do not offer poor schooling to poor people" (Rojas, 2008). CID, just like Fundación Escuela Nueva, focuses on good contact with the community leaders in charge of the *comedors* where the children have lunch and refreshments. A hot healthy lunch combats malnutrition, improves their concentration and gives the children (and their parents) an additional incentive for entering the learning circles.

As for the Escuela Nueva Foundation, CID carries out training works shops for tutors as well as introduction workshop and thematic workshops for parents following the suggestions and

expressed needs. Likewise, they have Micro centres are managed by the pedagogical advisors and is a space where the tutors, coordinator and advisors meet, discuss and find solutions to problems. The learning circles represent a permanent presence and supervision. The advisors need to visit the learning circles at least twice a week. He or she shares her experience with the tutors so that the tutors feel more comfortable and capable in their daily chores. The pedagogical advisor is followed up by the coordinator, who in turn is followed up and supervised by the team responsible for the learning circles working at the head office in Bogotá. CID tells me that the children attending the learning circles have been very stable. In the beginning they were a lot more absent, but if they are absent now, it is for reason. “We see improvements in their self esteem, and one important factor contributing to this is the student government. The student government belongs 100 % to the children”, Rivera says when I interview her (2008). With respect to the mother school, they are preoccupied about the number of placement, for the rest the collaboration and integration of the student is going well. The headmasters’ attitude towards the learning circles in Soacha is good, but the municipality lacks placements for 1200 children in the regular school system. This provides a challenge when the children are to be transferred to their mother school. In Comuna 6 for example, the number of placements available in the nearest school Eduardo Santos is limited meaning that some of the children, if more than 28 students are ready for transfer for this academic year, they might have to start at another public (mother) school further away, taking away some of the benefits that the learning circle and the collaboration with the local mother school offers. The most difficult part of operating the learning circles in Soacha is involving the family of the students. Due to many reasons, they are not very dedicated, and on an average workshop only 50 % of the families attend. Many students do not receive assistance in their home work (Rivera, 2008).

1.8 Summary

In this first chapter, I have given the rationale behind the study, introduced topic and research area, given my motivation behind the study as well as stated the research problem, objectives and research questions. This chapter also contains an introduction to the Colombian context, including geographical location, demographics and an historical overview and a description of the origins of the conflict. In addition, I have given a presentation of the municipality of Soacha and the national operators of the learning circles that I have studied, Fundación Escuela Nueva and Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo.

2 Internal displacement, youth and actors



PHOTO: Linda Pérez Bukåsen

This chapter defines displacement and presents groups of youth relevant for the lives and challenges of young IDPs. It also includes definitions of the main actors in the Colombian conflict whom deprived and poor youth and children are affected by the actions of, and in several cases, also recruited into.

2.1 Defining displacement

According to UNHCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) and the guiding principles on internal displacement, internally displaced people are

persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border (UNHCHR, 1998).

In the Colombian Law 387, the legal framework for the protection and assistance to IDPs, and IDP is defined as

...any person who has been forced to migrate within the national territory, abandoning his place of residence or customary economic activities, because his life, physical integrity, personal freedom or safety have been violated or are directly threatened as a result of any of the following situations: internal armed conflict, civil tension and disturbances, general violence, massive Human Rights violations, infringement of International Humanitarian Law, or other circumstances arising from the foregoing situations that drastically disturb or could drastically disturb the public order. (Brookings, 1997)

The Colombian writer and journalist Alfredo Molano has been one of the domestic actors in placing the situation of the Colombian IDPs on the national and international agenda. One of his messages is that displacement is not only a result of the conflict, it is also a strategy of war and a way of accumulating land in a country rich in natural resources. He finds the term 'displacement' inadequate as it does not embrace the real meaning behind; arguing that

The term “displaced” denounces the intention to mask one of the most tragic and bloodthirsty episodes of our time. The truth is that people do not move: they are moved, exiled, expelled, forced to flee and hide. Another method used to conceal this fact consists in seeing it as if it were the result of clashes between two new actors: the guerrillas and the paramilitary. Nevertheless, population expulsions are but an old resource used by the system, which, by pointing to illegal armed groups as the original source of the problem, exonerates the Regime and above all the Armed Forces from all responsibility. (The citation is from Alfredo Molano’s book ‘The dispossessed’, 2001).

2.1.1 Guiding principles on internal displacement

According to the first article in the guiding principles, internally displaced persons ‘shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced’ (UNHCHR, 1998).

In 1998, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were presented to the UN Human Rights Commission as an ‘effort to compile and restate existing international human rights and international humanitarian law provisions applicable to internally displaced persons (IDPs)’ (Internal Displacement, 2008). Today, ten years later, the guiding principles are widely used by governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a basis for programs and advocacy related to IDPs. And despite the fact that the GPs are not legally binding as a result of formal approval after an intergovernmental process, a growing number of governments and regional organizations are using them as the basis for laws and policies on internal displacement. However, increased awareness and legislation are only the first steps towards ensuring that the rights of the IDPs are fulfilled. Still, they do not have the rights nor the legal protection as the refugees crossing national borders.

2.1.2 The violation of the rights of IDPs

The rights of displaced children are frequently violated both as a result of the conflict and the inability of the government to address their needs and right to assistance and protection. Widespread discrimination, abuse, malnutrition, poverty and lack of access to education are just some examples of the violation of their rights as children (Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including optional protocol for children in armed conflict, IDMC b, 2008) and as IDPs (the Refugee Convention and Guiding principles on IDPs, UNHCHR, 1998). According to these conventions and principles, the state has the main responsibility for the protection of displaced children, but even though national commitments are made to not use landmines, attack schools or use children as soldiers, there is still a long way to go (IDMC c, 2008). The ongoing conflict, the magnitude of the problem and lack of resources and political will are some of the constraints for making policy and legal rights a reality in many war and conflict affected countries.

IDPs worldwide face many similar challenges. Reduced access to adequate housing, few employment opportunities and loss of land records and identification are some of the immediate results of displacement. Without recovering land records, resettlement at a later stage is more difficult. Without identification papers, IDPs have reduced or no right to public assistance. If they cannot prove their existence, the children face problems enrolling school and neither children nor adults are entitled to basic health care. Without education and knowledge about their rights, their prospects of improving their situation and claiming these rights fulfilled are by scholars and practitioners considered as marginal (Dupuy, 2008 Freire,

1989). Without prospects of a better life, today's children will become frustrated and marginalised adults. Even worse, many of them will have few other options than engaging in criminal activities like joining gangs, paramilitary groups or guerrilla, and in that way being less able to break out of the vicious circle of marginalization, violence and conflict.

2.1.3 Urban internal displacement

IDPs tend to flee to the larger cities where they can blend in and start a new life far from the conflict they often have been forced to become a part of. Shantytowns are expanding in the outskirts of the cities of Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Santa Marta and Cartagena as 40 per cent of the IDPs are settling in the urban areas surrounding the country's ten largest cities (Flyktninghjelpen, 2008). Most IDPs flee to Bogotá, and as many as 65 per cent of them end up in my area of study, the marginalized municipality of Soacha (PCS, 2002). In stead of finding safety, many IDPs are increasingly exposed to crime and violence and forcing them to leave again, causing intra-urban displacements. An increased presence of armed actors in the cities has contributed to the creation of network of organized crime. In addition, cleansing squads been organized, partly with help from the army, to eliminate 'unwanted' elements in a community. IDPs and community leaders are main victims of this kind of urban warfare (Global IDP report, 2003).

2.1.4 The life situation and life chances of young IDPs

Children and young IDPs are as indicated in the introduction particularly vulnerable to displacement. Being uprooted and forced to leave their home, land and belongings behind is only the beginning of a challenging and difficult situation. Living in miserable conditions, often in shantytowns with limited access to education, health services, protection and legal and financial assistance often makes their future prospects look grim. Seeing how their parents are struggling to make a living, often outside the formal system with no security or guarantees, does seldom improve this picture. If you add this to a community in constant change due to a contentious influx of IDPs and high rates of violence and crime, their opportunity to break of the spiral of negative effect might seem impossible. The term 'life chance' will in my thesis refer to their ability to break out of this spiral through education and use and/or construction of social capital. Improving life chances will be seen in relationship with the concept of empowerment (see theoretical framework) and be related to how increased knowledge and self esteem is enabling the IDPs to actively improve their chances of having a better future. Lack of future opportunities can have many negative effects on a young IDP's life. Some will just unable to break of the spiral of marginalization trying to get by the best they can, while others might engage in criminal activities, gangs or illegal armed groups (IRIN, 2007). Some of the groups present in IDP neighbourhoods like Soacha are therefore included below.

2.1.5 Young IDPs, violence and crime

The close relationship between illegal armed groups and their use of drug trafficking and kidnapping as financial sources, makes the distinction between criminal gangs and urban armed forces less obvious. In the documentary 'La Sierra' (S. Dalton and Martinez, M. 2005) this issue was filmed in a poor paramilitary dominated *barrio* in Medellín where the majority of the population is IDPs. We get a close-up portrait of Edison, the 22 year old local paramilitary leader of the paramilitary group Bloque Metro. His daily struggle in maintaining territorial power and getting access to money through criminal activities are far more

important than the ideological battle against left wing guerrillas that usually take place on a national level. His honest answer to the question of why he had joined a paramilitary group was simply access to guns, women and easy money - in addition to a sense of purpose and brotherhood. He knew that his chances for improving his life through education and paid work were marginal as the presence of the public authorities was virtually non-existent. Joining the paramilitary force was in many ways just the same as joining a gang, a common response to social exclusion in large parts of Latin-America (Bukåsen b, 2007) as well as the USA. As for his prospects for life he had hopes for seeing his six children grow up, but stated that he would probably die very young. He proved himself right soon enough as the directors were not even finished with the documentary when Edison was found dead in the streets of La Sierra with gun shots in his head.

Medellin had at this time about 400 violent gangs involving 10, 000 young people. The past twenty years approximately 40, 000 people between 14-25 years have died violently in Medellin. The combination of poverty, urban warfare and illegal drug trafficking devastated the young population in a city that used to be one of the drug capitals in world (Watchlist, 2004:9). This example illuminates several important aspects I find relevant for my future thesis: That there are often close connections between crime, violence and active involvement in the conflict. It also shows the results of social marginalization and lack of alternatives, like prospects for education and future employment. In addition, it illustrates the magnitude of the problem when the combination of factors like urbanization of the conflict and internal displacement are mutually worsening the situation.

2.1.6 Gangs and gang members

Colombian gangs are mostly referred to as either pandillas or maras. The numbers of gangs in Soacha is according to the Colombian sociologist Enrique Martín currently 30. He studied the characteristics and dynamics of gang formation, and estimates that the total number of gang members in the urban area comprising both Bogotá and Soacha is 19,700 (Martín, 2008). But what is a gang compared to a group of friends that spend time and do things together? According to Curry and Decker in Nordvik (2007:22) there are several key features that must be in place before you can label a group a gang. First, there must be a group of individuals, meaning more than one person. The second feature is the use of symbols to express membership in a specific gang. Such symbols can be clothing, handshakes and tattoos. More than these kinds of symbols, there must be additional elements of gang membership expressed by its members. These include verbal and non-verbal communication like slang, gestures and graffiti. A gang also needs to have certain duration of existence and a territorial affiliation. Finally, Curry and Decker claim that a gang has to be involved in criminal activities, this is essential in distinguishing a gang from for instance an academic club or a sports organization.

2.1.7 Child soldiers

According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), children have the right to be protected against recruitment to armed forces or armed groups. Despite this, half of the countries engaged in warfare in 2004 were using child combatants under the age of 15. Reports from Colombia reveal that the number of children used by armed forces has increased to 11, 000 the past few years (Coalition Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, CSUCS, 2004). By the term child soldier, I will in this paper use CSUCS' definition:

Any person under 18 years of age used in any capacity by an armed force or armed group – including but not limited to the use as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, spies and for sexual purposes or forced marriage – is deemed a child associated with an armed force or armed group (commonly known as ‘child soldier’). The term does not, therefore, only refer to a girl or a boy who is carrying or has carried arms. It also includes a child who is considered or treated as a deserter for choosing to flee. (Cited in Save the Children, 2007)

2.1.8 The guerrilla

A guerrilla group can be defined as ‘an irregular armed force that fights a stronger force by sabotage and harassment’ (Word Reference, 2009). In the Colombian context, the guerrilla groups are left-wing insurgent groups founded in the 1960s as a response to the unequal distribution of power, land and resources. The two largest guerrilla groups in Colombia are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or FARC), and the National Liberation Army (ELN) (CFR, 2008). Among the warfare methods applied are ambush, sabotage and kidnappings (ICG, 2004), the latter also an increasingly important source of income in addition to drug trafficking. In 2001 FARC had an estimated force of 16,000 combatants, while the number of fighters was reported to have been reduced to 9,000 in 2008. The number of ELN-combatants is estimated to be between 2,200 and 3,000 (CFR, 2009).

2.1.9 Paramilitary groups

A Paramilitary force is defined as a force ‘whose function and organization are similar to those of a professional military force but which are not regarded as having the same status’ (D. Academic, no date). The nature of the paramilitary forces varies according to context. While in Northern Ireland, paramilitary refers to any illegal armed group with a political purpose, the Colombians use the word paramilitary to describe illegal right-winged armed groups. The left-wing groups with a political purpose are as already mentioned referred to as guerrilla. Depending on context, paramilitary groups can include ‘auxiliary services of regular armed forces, national intelligence service units and some internal security, border protection and law enforcement organizations that are not considered part of the military forces but are similar in training, equipment and/or organization’ (D. Academic, no date). A paramilitary group in the Colombian context is normally considered a self defence group or a private, armed group that emerged to protect specific interests such as landowners and businessmen which is, at least in theory, ideologically to the far right fighting the left-wing guerrilla groups (CFR, 2009).

2.1.10 Drug traffickers

Drug trafficking implies cultivation, production, distribution and sale of illegal drugs on the black market (Machado, 1994-2003). During the 1970s and 1980s, the business of drug traffickers had an increased impact on the Colombian society. As their businesses and power increased an increasingly part of the population got directly or indirectly affected by or involved in the drug trafficking. From the early 1980s drug money started to penetrate Colombian institutions such as the armed forces, the police, the justice system and political parties and thus affecting the whole democracy (Krauss, 2009). During what is referred to as the narco-terror period, the drug cartels of Medellín and Cali controlled an estimated 80-90 per cent of the Colombian cocaine export. Despite the drug lord’s assassinations of three presidential candidates, they received high levels of popular support, particularly Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel invested in infrastructure and

social welfare projects benefitting the marginalized (ibid). Since the 1980s, the activities of the drug traffickers contributed to a shift in the conflict from being mostly politically motivated to become a conflict with competition over land for growing coca as illegal armed groups finance their military operations through their income from drug trade (ICG, 2004). In 2008, half of the income for the FARC-guerrilla came from drug trafficking, an amount estimated to between USD 200 million and 300 million a year (CFR, 2009).

2.1.11 The Colombian state

The role of the state in the conflict can be analyzed from several different perspectives. First of all it plays a role by its 'legitimate' mandate of fighting the illegal armed groups whose political aim, putting it a bit simple, has been to overthrow the elected governments after centuries of social and political exclusion of the majority of the population. The challenge throughout the conflict has been the close links between the powerful elite, who is not necessarily open for social change as it poses a threat to status quo and challenges the traditional structures of power and land distribution, and the leaders of the security forces. That both politicians and high ranking army officials have had close relationships to paramilitary groups as described in the previous chapter when referring to the para-political scandal, makes the role of the authorities dual: Not only do they fight the guerrilla through the army and police forces, they have also partly been collaborating with paramilitary groups who have reportedly committed most human rights violations against civilians, including being responsible for killings and massacres creating massive displacement (Leech, 2004)

The role of the state should also be seen in relationship to its ability to protect and follow up the internally displaced, and how some measures have even contributed to new displacements. As quite a paradox, Colombia has both one of the world's biggest IDP populations and the most protective legislative frameworks (Birkenes, 2006). A national security policy introduced by the current President has been to involve civilians in contra-insurgency by handing out arms to peasants and creating a network of informants. These security efforts have drawn civilians further into the conflict and have forced even more people to leave their homes behind (ibid). Another policy initiated during Uribe's first term in office was that of returning 150, 000 refugees in four years. A problem has been unsafe returns as the government, at least in the first phase, was 'unable to comply with its legal obligations to ensure voluntary, safe and dignified return of IDPs and creating conditions conducive for durable return' (Global IDP project, 2003). The government has been criticised for threatening IDPs to cut of assistance if they chose not to return, even though returns have meant that that they go back to areas where the conflict is still going on, putting the returned IDPs in risk of a second displacement (ibid).

2.2 Summary

In this chapter, I have defined and conceptualized some of the critical aspects of displacement. I have also included definitions of some of the main actors in the conflict as child soldiers have been and are still recruited into illegal armed forces - both to left and to the right. Presence of gangs and drug traffickers have also been discussed as the armed conflict goes far beyond the warfare actions of the combatants. The presence and activities pose a threat to many aspects of a young, war-affected person's life both as they are exposed to violence and attracted to or forcibly recruited into gangs and/or drug trafficking. I have also included the role of the Colombian state; even though the description is short an only includes some of the many perspectives that are relevant for this thesis.

3 Theoretical framework and prior research



PHOTO: Linda Pérez Bukâsen

Prior studies and theory have been vital in guiding me both when developing my research proposal and when analyzing my empirical findings. In this chapter, I will present the theoretical assumptions that my study is built upon as well as empirical findings from relevant contexts. This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I will look into the concepts of empowerment and social capital, including their measurements. Then I will give a presentation of literature review carried out with respect to development, management and participation.

PART 1: Empowerment, social capital and human rights

There are two concepts I consider particularly relevant and inter-related for my future thesis; these are empowerment and use and formation of social capital. Closely related to the realization of empowerment and use of social capital is the concept of 'rights' - human rights, children's rights or IDP's rights - and how these might be strengthened (through being 'empowered') or violated (e. g when use of empowerment and social capital in providing public services results in public withdrawal and neglect). The concept of rights will be looked into when considered relevant in order to exemplify dilemmas and challenges that might occur.

3.1 Defining empowerment

Many Colombian IDPs have for too long waited for their rights to be fulfilled and their lives to improve. The term empowerment in this paper is related to the IDP's needs to be equipped with more knowledge and confidence in order to actively improve their own lives. There are several ways of looking at empowerment. Some scholars consider it as yet another word with loose meaning, like Oakley in Cornwall when he argued that

...the term 'empowering' has come to be very loosely used to describe any development project, process or activities which might have some impact upon people's abilities to relate to different political and administrative systems; to skills training, management techniques, and organisational abilities and so on. Many development projects talk of 'empowering' in the sense of specifically enabling people to cope more effectively with and play a part in the every-day administrative and bureaucratic demands of a development project's life (1995:6).

Another critique of the term empowerment has been directed towards a tendency to treat it as a commodity that can be handed over from one person to another, indicating that it is something that is possessed instead of exercised (Humphries, 1996).

Cornwell herself stated (2000: 33); 'empowerment is not something that can be done to people, but something people do by and for themselves', which I consider an important point. Important is also Alsop's argument (2004) which I will get back to when presenting the analytic framework for measuring empowerment which concludes that an empowered group or person is empowered when they possess the capacity to *make effective choices*.

For this thesis I have chosen to use the definition presented by the World Bank that defines it as

'The process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes' (World Bank, 2008).

The main reason for choosing this definition is that the framework for measuring empowerment (see 4.4) is built upon this definition and the work of the World Bank Empowerment Group (Alsop, 2004).

3.2 Defining and conceptualizing social capital

In a country like Colombia, where thousands of IDPs are not given proper access to public services such as education, internally displaced persons are much more than passive receivers. On the contrary, as the lack of public goods affects their lives in many vital areas, joint mobilization is often their only chance for improvement. As Putnam stated in (2002:18): 'War creates social problems and individual needs that government has neither the infrastructure nor the resources to address'. Within social networks there are forces or values like norms, trust and reciprocity with a strong potential of contributing to a better results (Putnam, 2002).

Putnam in Evans (1996a:1033) labelled these networks and norms 'social capital', indicating that these represent a valuable economic asset:

Similar to the notions of physical and human capital the term 'social capital' refers to features of social organization – such as networks, norms, and trust – that increase a society's productive potential. Through largely neglected in discussions of public policy, social capital substantially enhances return to investments in physical and human capital...The implications for social and economic policy are far reaching.

But Putnam was not the first to introduce the term 'social capital'. Almost 100 years ago, the educator and social reformer Hanifan urged the importance of increased community involvement (Putnam, 2002:4) by using the term 'social capital'. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu appears according to McLean, Schultz and Steger (2002) to be one of the first to use the expression social capital in a contemporary setting. He defined social capital as

‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’ (2002:5).

McLean, Schultz and Steger highlights how Bourdieu view social capital in *functional* terms: ‘This definition depicted social capital in functional terms – as something essential for building up economic capital and social status and essential for maintaining the possibility for future social participation’ (2002:5).

Also the sociologist James Coleman focuses on functions (ibid):

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure...Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman, 2000:16).

According to McLean, Schultz and Steger (2002:5) social capital for Coleman ‘is, therefore, not a characteristic of individual agents but “inheres the structure of relations between actors and among actors [Coleman, 2000:160]. It is “the connective tissue” of society which makes it easier for people to trust each other and build relationships, especially in the area of commerce.’

Contrary to other assets, these assets normally do not require use of limited resources and its stock accumulates with use instead of being reduced (Evans, 1996a:1034). Putnam has also been quoted in Edwards and Fowler (2002: 313). They refer to Putnam’s statement of what comes first; wealth or civilization: ‘the historical record strongly suggests that the successful communities became rich because they were civic, not the other way around’. They also refer to Putnam’s (1993a) emphasis on the non-private property view, being:

Unlike conventional capital, social capital is a public good that is not the private property of those who benefit from it. Most often the ties, norms, and trust that constitute social capital are created as a by-product of other social activities and then transferred from one social setting to another.

This view is also supported by Coleman cited in McLean, Schultz and Steger (2002:6) when he describes social capital as a ‘public good that is created as a by-product of other activities’ and is his view ‘indispensable for the production of other forms of capital.

One of the major challenges in constructing social capital in a country with a number of internal displacements is people constantly on the move. This aspect was also recognized by Putnam (2002:18) when he argues that ‘social capital formation suffers due to rapid mobility or long-distance commuting, undermining the social connectedness’ between people.

Despite a contrasting experience with the ‘East-Asian miracle’ in countries like South Korea and Taiwan where strong public sectors have directed the progress, there is a growing consensus that both public sector and social capital are needed to create development. Crucial for Colombia in this context is how to make the two sectors (public and private) work well together, creating room for real synergy. One potential danger of including social capital in development efforts is when the public sector takes more from the civil networks than they add, creating a ‘zero-sum’ relationship where government initiatives diminishes the social capital (Coleman in Evans 1996:1034). For Colombian IDPs this could for instance be that their involvement together with NGO-support and other donations could make it easier for the government to withdraw from their responsibilities and put the right to free, universal education at risk. Others, like Putnam (in Evans, 1996a) argue for synergy, and even though

'zero-sum' results are unavoidable from time to time, the citizen involvement can strengthen and increase the efficiency of local organizations and institutions (Evans, 1996a:1034), or, as Watson in Ostrom (1996:1075) stated; increasing responsiveness. In order to ensure good results of state and civil sector collaboration efforts however, responsiveness needs to be seen as an integrated part committing both sides. Synergies between the two sectors require that also the civil sector comply with what is agreed upon. But how do we conceptualize the opportunities for collaboration and how can it be done in real life?

Ostrom and her colleagues developed the term "coproduction" to describe the potential relationship that exists between the regular "producers" and citizens as "clients". Coproduction is seen as a way of enabling synergy between what a government does and what citizens do (1996:1079). Such synergy is not always possible. One instrument for identifying areas for creating synergy is by using functions indicating if the inputs are complementary or not. When the public agents and the citizens are sufficiently different in terms of what they can offer and their input is equally necessary, their joint output will be better than if only one of the parties was involved. If this is not the case, there will be little incentives for organizing collective actions (Evans, 1996b).

But social capital can not only be considered as an asset that always contributes to development and improvement for the community or society it appears in. In his essay examining the phenomena of social capital in Spain during the past 60 years, Víctor Pérez-Díaz uses the term *uncivil* social capital when he discusses the formation and use of social capital during the Spanish civil war (Putnam, 2002). Yes, there were massive amounts of social connections at work on both on the Nationalists and the Republican side. But the extreme rivalling between the two, and the methods applied that resulted in 500,000 deaths in three years, had little to do with what is considered a 'civil' society.

Even though the internal war in Colombia is different in many aspects, there are also similarities that make his essay an interesting contribution to the nature and works of social capital in a country affected by civil war or internal conflict. The polarization between the actors makes it difficult to trust each other and civilians are often forced or expected to belong or express support to one of the conflicting actors. In Colombia this is in fact one of the main reasons behind displacement, and it is striking how the conflict continues through the presence and participation for or against on of the actors (Garzón, 2005). In their study on urban perceptions of violence and exclusion in Colombia (2000, 71-72) Moser and McIlwaine stresses the strong presence of perverse social capital in marginalized neighbourhoods. When they conducted their study applying urban appraisal methods, community members were asked to point out social institutions in order to identify the structural social capital at local level. Also gangs, guerrilla groups and paramilitary organizations were identified as local institutions. Contrast to the positive or constructive social capital that emerges from local networks or groups working with e. g youth or women and is benefiting the whole community, gangs and illegal armed groups produce *perverse* social capital. This means that the 'institution' is benefiting, but that the community as a whole is suffering or being hurt as a result of their activities (Moser and McIlwaine, 2000:4). The social institutions identified were a wide range of institutions (NGOs, religious groups, youth, sports and recreational organizations etc), but the membership organizations with the highest prevalence in the poor neighbourhoods studied were perverse organizations like gangs and illegal armed groups. Studies and assessments carried out in Soacha were I carried out my fieldwork (Garzón; 2005, OCHA; 2006) confirms these groups are highly present in both sector 4 (Comuna 4) and 6 (Comuna 6).

3.3 Empowerment and social capital versus rights

One main challenge for internal refugees in Colombia is not that they do not have rights; the problem is that they are often not heard or not in a position able to claim those rights. Empowerment involves changes in power relations in three interconnected areas: within society, within the state, and between the state and society. According to a World Bank report it is important to distinguish empowerment in the sense of actors' capacities from rights in the sense of institutionally recognized opportunities as these not always go together (Alsop, 2004:71). This is very much what happens in Colombia when IDPs intend to claim their rights and are not met with an appropriate response (Refugees International, 2008). The result is a number of private or public-private projects that aim to bridge the gap (at least in education and health) often involving the IDPs themselves in collaboration with private actors, such as local, national and international NGOs. This kind of empowered participatory governance has, according to Alsop the potential of turning a zero-sum confrontation situation into a win-win solution (2004:75).

3.4 Measuring empowerment

Empowerment can be measured from a perspective that seeks to identify degree of empowerment by looking into *agency* and *opportunity structure*. More direct measures can be identified by assessing if the *option to make a choice* exists, if the *option to chose is used* and the *results achieved from the choices is made* (Alsop, 2004:122).

3.4.1 Degree of empowerment

A persons' capacity to make effective choices is according to Alsop, Heinsohn and Somma (Alsop, 2004: 121) influenced by two inter-related factors: agency and opportunity structure. Agency is defined as 'an actor's ability to make meaningful choices', while opportunity structure is defined as 'those aspects of the context within which actors operate that determine their ability to transform agency into effective action'. Working together, these factors are expected to contribute to different degrees of empowerment. An actor's opportunity structure is created by the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions which includes laws, regulatory frameworks and norms governing people's behaviour. A person or group's asset endowment is used as an indicator of agency. These assets include psychological, informational, organizational, material, financial and human assets. According to Alsop Heinsohn and Somma, there is a relationship between 'agency, opportunity structure and degree of empowerment'. The relationship is quite complicated and seldom linear, and highly depending on context. Even as individuals, our abilities and opportunities for empowerment will vary. A former student at the learning circles might meet more challenges and perhaps feel less empowered in meeting with the public office giving assistance to IDPs than when organizing community activities in order to improve the situation of IDP youth. In this analytic framework, both agency and opportunity structure is treated as (1) casually related to the degree of empowerment of a group or individual, (2) contingent on a degree of empowerment, and (3) modifiable as a result of the empowerment process' (Alsop, 2004:122).

FIGURE 1. The Relationship between Outcomes and Correlates of Empowerment

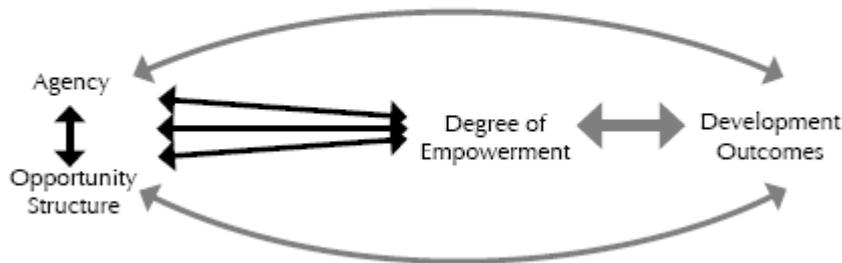


Figure 1: From Power, Rights and Poverty' (Alsop, 2004:121)

3.4.2 Domain and roles

Alsop, Heinsohn and Somma also use the term “domain” (2004:123) as one part of the framework for analyzing empowerment. With domain, they refer to a persons’ life and sees it as a stage where different roles are played. The three main domains are:

- The state, where the person acts as a citizen
- Society, where the person acts as a social actor
- The market, in which a person is an economic actor

Each of the domains can, according to this approach, be divided into sub domains, such as society being divided into household and community and justice and politics a sub domain of the state. For this study, I find it convenient to identify the learning circles, which is to be considered as the main domain, as a sub domain of the community which again is a sub domain of society. In the setting where I met the students, tutors and mothers, they are mainly performing their role as social actors. But I also argue that their purpose of performing this role is related to that of a citizen. The tutors are partly acting on behalf of the government, partly on behalf of the operators through the private-public partnership that the learning circles today have become. They are professional actors with a mission: to educate out of school children affected by armed conflict; and that with tools promoting citizenship through participation in committees and student governments. The parents are social actors that are invited to join activities (workshops, homework, projects) that increase their participation as citizens. That way they are performing roles contributing to their own empowerment (through increased knowledge and participatory experience) and that of their children (through their support and encouragement but also because of what they learn).

3.5 Measuring social capital

Lack of quantification of stock of social capital makes it difficult to find a measurement of its impact on micro and macro level (Putnam, 2002:17). I have nevertheless chosen an approach similar to that of Putman (2000, 2002) and Moser and McILwaine (2002) who focuses on the existence of social groups and networks. In addition to formal networks which are easier to detect when conducting larger, national surveys such as in the works of Putnam, I will seek to identify informal, social groups. If we consider what Putnam views as ‘measurable number and density of a society’s human connections and memberships that connect us in civil society’ (McLean, Schultz, Steger, 2002), one way of measuring social capital is to map the existence of social groups and networks that exist in the specific society that is being studied.

In my field work there are two different levels of such existence: On community level and on learning circle level. The students' and their parents' participation in social groups and networks will be one important indicator when trying to measure the stock of social capital. Questions related to trust, friendship and who they would seek to for help and advice, are also considered part of the data that will help me measure existence of informal social capital. Different types and dimensions of social capital (Putnam, 2002:9-19) will be used to measure its nature and potential impact. Types of social capital that will be included in the analytic discussion are bonding versus bridging social capital and inward looking social capital versus outward looking.

3.5.1 Bonding and bridging social capital

One of way of looking at social capital is to distinguish between bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) social capital (Putnam, 2000:22). While bonding social capital '...brings together people who are like one another in important aspects (race, gender, social class), bridging social capital refers to social networks that bring together people who are unlike one another' (Putnam, 2002:11). Bonding is considered good for 'specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity', but bridging can be better in 'relationship to external assets and for information diffusion'. According to Xavier de Souza Briggs, bonding social capital is good for "getting by" while bridging social capital is good for "getting ahead" (Putnam, 2000:23). If we make the world a bit smaller and consider the learning circles as the arena for bonding social capital as students in more or less similar conditions meet, learn and participate around common goals and purposes, the rest of the community can be seen as the arena where the bridging social capital exists and is being built. In that sense, what is happening in the learning circles is the formation of bonding capital as the students are "getting by" as they are given the education they are entitled to. They are also taught in a manner and given tools to strengthen the social capital building within their specific group, aspects that further contribute to social capital formation. But the operators express that they seek to accomplish more, involving parents, community leaders, local and other NGOs and institutions, moving towards bridging social capital, or "getting ahead". Another question related to bonding social capital produced is the long term perspective. The time perspective in the learning circles is limited, normally not more than one or two years. Whether the relationship that the students have developed continue to exist when they enter a mother school depend on a lot of factors, for instance if they are transferred at the same time, and if they meet or adjust to the different education regime in a similar manner. It also depends on how they are received and integrated by the mother school.

3.5.2 Bridging social capital and embededness

Looking further than only the communities, the bonding social capital can be viewed as that of each community, while the bridging social capital happens on a broader arena or higher level. Mark Granovetter (referred to in Putnam, 2000:21) states for instance that when seeking political allies, our weak links to people we just know a bit but who move in other circles than we do, are more important than near friends who move about in the same circles (Putnam, 2000:23). This could indicate that whereas the learning circles have a role of facilitating bonding social capital within the communities they operate, the operators and their partners such as Norwegian Refugee Council represent through their contacts, knowledge and national programs a higher stock of bridging social capital. An example of this is how the national and international NGOs have ensured that the learning circles now form part of the formal education system and guarantees the students' placement in normal schools through direct

contact and advocacy on municipality, department and national level. This would not have been achieved by bonding capital alone. This achievement can also be seen in light of social capital and *embeddedness* as argued by Evans (1996b) when he states that creating public-private synergies by using social capital is about a lot more than creating complementary inputs (meaning that what each of the two sectors invests is not overlapping). The importance of ensuring complementary inputs counts for only half of what is required. The other half is referred to as embeddedness and implies a much tighter connection between the educational authorities and the NGOs operating the learning circles. The main focus for this thesis will however be on community level.

3.5.3 Inward and outward-looking social capital - thin and thick ties

Another interesting difference in types of social capital relevant in this context is dividing into inward-looking and outward-looking social capital. Inward-looking social networks 'tend to promote the interests of their members, while the outward with public goods. Groups in the first category are often organized along class, gender or ethnicity, e.g. labour organization, the latter Red Cross and environmental organizations' (Putnam: 2002:11). Putnam warns against considering the second group as superior to the first. Comparing it with the reference to the terms bonding and bridging social capital; the students both need an educational offer and tools to strengthen their ability to improve their lives (empower themselves), and political, legal and institutional guarantees addressing the root causes to the problems in the marginalized communities, that requires use of outward-looking social capital. This view can also be viewed with respect to weak and strong ties (Granovetter in Putnam, 2002:10). Even though family members and close friend normally form part of your strong ties, weak ties are important when you seek to achieve something that your closest cannot help you with. For instance, if you apply for a job, it is often more likely that someone in your extended network (thin social capital) can help you as they are likely to have other social networks and know other people than you. Displacement and migration also contributes to broken family structures, meaning that many live far away from grand parents, uncles, aunts and even brothers and sisters. In these cases, thinner social capital might be regarded as just as important as thick when looking for solutions. This also applies for finding solutions to conflicts. Intra-familial violence is wide spread both according to the interviewees and public research (DANE 2003, Tarquino, 2008), and even though some reported that they try to solve conflicts within the family, several of the interviewees also report that they would need to seek assistance from others when the conflict generates or contains of violence and/or abuse. In these cases thin social capital, mainly represented by neighbours or also institutions such as the police or psychologists, might be seen as more helpful than thick social capital.

3.5.4 Defining 'community' and identifying learning circle stakeholders

According to Kubisch and Sullivan in (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan and Aber, 1997:191), there are three different approaches in defining the concept of community; community as 'place', community as 'face' and community as 'space'. Defining community as 'place' is looking at its geographical location by e.g. referring to a neighbourhood. Approaching a community as 'face' involves the psychological associations that residents have within their community; indicating the existing relationships and networks of social support. 'Space' views communities as physical and built environments for living, working and political organizing. The concept of 'community' refers in this thesis both to the actual places - neighbourhoods - where the learning circles examined are operating, and those they reach out to. Given the analytic focus on social capital, community as a 'face' will also be part of my approach. As a

learning circle is teaching children from more than one neighbourhood, the term ‘community’ is not limited to the specific neighbourhood where the learning circle is situated, even though it is natural to assume that the relationship of the operators and staff to that specific neighbourhood, including its community leaders, is closer than that to the surrounding neighbourhoods.

In addition to primarily look at ‘community’ as ‘place’ and ‘face’, I find it necessary to define it more precisely by identifying key community stakeholders. Parents are, as already highlighted, considered major stakeholders by the operators. Without their consent, many more children stay out of school. Without the parents’ commitment, the educational impact is expected to be lower, and the operators’ ability to contribute to the creation of bridges between the learning circles and the targeted communities more is considered more difficult (Ayala, 2008). Another important community stakeholder group is community leaders, both with respect to the community where the learning circle is located and with respect to where the children actually live. The tutors are also important stakeholders, their ability to work in the neighbourhoods where the learning circles are situated are crucial for the actual outcome. Other important stakeholders are the mother schools, public educational authorities, the learning circle operators and the supporting or funding NGOs.

3.6 Critical views on social capital

One of the most recent and vastly quoted scholars focusing on social capital is without doubt Robert D. Putnam, particularly after his book ‘Bowling alone’ entered US best selling lists (Harvard Kennedy School, 2008). Critics on his theories of social capital and democratic participation has been presented by a number of scholars, and in the book ‘Social Capital – Critical Perspectives on Community and Bowling Alone’, McLean, Schultz and Steger (2002) presents twelve essays discussing some of the critical views. One of the critics is that Putnam fails to give evidence indicating why social capital increases democratic participation in the political realm saying that he theorizes social capital as both cause and effect of civic action (McLean et al., 2002:8), e. g failing to give attention to the importance of context (essay written by Alex-Assensoh in McLean, Schultz and Steger, 2002:203). He is also criticised for not giving much emphasis on the role of the authorities in creating social capital and that people today organize in different, less formal ways and on other than the traditional arenas. The increasingly important role of globalization for instance, is not given any focus at all (2002:8).

PART 2: Literature review

3.7 Education, empowerment and conflict

The empowerment potential that lies in education is if not unquestionable, fairly well accepted by practitioners, scholars and beneficiaries alike. Leading agents such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) its Education for All initiatives are for instance working on a Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) which is conceived as a global strategic framework, and key operational mechanism for achieving the goals and purposes of the UN Literacy Decade. Through LIFE, UNESCO’s strategy centres on *empowering learners* through country-led practice, informed by evidence-

based research. Working on a global level, UNESCO will raise international and national awareness on the importance of literacy, advocate for political will and resources and look at policy development and capacity-building through technical assistance (UNESCO, 2008).

For my future thesis there is however one more aspect that is of vital importance and that give the picture an additional and complicating dimension – the conflict. The International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) launched in March the report ‘Education for Peace’ together with Save the Children looking into the relationship between education and peace (Dupuy, 2008). The report focuses on social capital, civil society-school relationships and the potential social benefits of education. One aspect that is highlighted is the additional cost of engaging in armed conflict if you have managed to get an education. Contrary to this research proposal, Dupuy has chosen to focus on *formal* education systems. The study is focused on four conflict-transforming concepts that mediate the relationship between education and peace. These are:

1. Equitable educational *inclusion* within the formal education system can redress motivations and eliminate opportunities to engage in armed conflict.
2. School *socialization* processes can impact social acceptance of and constraints regarding the use of violence. As a result of improved quality and safer, protective learning environment, individuals may have less motivation, as well as fewer opportunities to engage in armed conflict.
3. Building up trust and cooperation (*social capital*) through school-based organizations can rectify grievances over lack of participation and improve relationships between individuals and groups.
4. The various *social benefits* of education (including hope and possibilities for the future, as well as improved levels of socio-economic development) can raise the social, direct, and opportunity costs of engaging in armed conflict.

The key findings in the report are:

- Educational inclusion lowers motivation and raises opportunity costs for participating in armed conflict
- Government investment in formal education systems is critical for building peace
- Quality education delivered in violent-free, cooperative learning environments teaches children critical lessons about non-violent conflict resolution.
- The curriculum is a critical element in efforts to heighten constraints against the use of violence and promote human rights.
- Participatory education systems can raise the social cost of and constraints against engaging in armed conflict.
- Education that fosters positive socio-economic development can help prevent armed conflict.

As the report is written as a result of Save the Children’s global campaign Rewrite the Future that inspired me to look into education in a conflict setting in the first place, this report will be a piece of documentation that I will seek to build further upon - at least those parts relevant to my research questions, data collection and future data analysis.

3.8 Development

An important question for my study is the importance or potential of education for empowerment in a conflict context. Broadening this perspective could be to also include development, which can be seen as the desired outcome of an education for empowerment process, addressing the negative effect of the internal war and displacement. The development discourse can be seen from three different main perspectives: modernization, dependency and human development. Whereas the modernization perspective with emphasis on economic growth requires underdeveloped countries to catch up by taking advantage of technology,

capital and a skilled workforce, the dependent perspective claims that poverty not is accidental but caused by the same processes that made developed countries rich (Sein and Harindranath, 2004:16). Scholars like Amartya Sen argue on the other hand, points at humans claiming that development should not be viewed in terms of economic measures like average annual income, but rather in terms of real freedoms that people can enjoy such as economic facilities and social opportunities. According to an abstract of Terjesen (2004) analyzing Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*, Sen describes human freedoms as 'both the primary end objective and the principle means of development; economic measures are merely the means to this end'. Sen frames development as the 'realization of freedom and the abolishment of 'unfreedoms' such as poverty, famine, and lack of political rights'. Both the marginalized situation and lack of real access to education and other public services could be seen as a 'deprivation of the capability' of IDPs, and 'shared humanity' can be linked to empowerment and use of social capital. According to Alex- Assenoh in McLean, Schultz and Steger (2002:205-206), 'one line of research suggests that the effect of living in concentrated poverty neighbourhoods have either very little impact on civic engagement for poor residents [Berry Portney, Thompson, 1991], or that the impact is positive, in that it compels citizens to work together in an effort to eradicate neighbourhoods problems [Crenson, 1983]."

3.8.1 Empowerment and development effectiveness

According to the World Bank (2002) there are several channels through which empowerment can enhance development; some of these are related to development effectiveness. The World Bank highlights particularly the areas of good governance and growth, making growth pro-poor and what they refer to as the project-level evidence. Good governance is considered to play a major role in making development possible (UNESCAP, 2007:3). UNDP states that good governance depends upon public participation to ensure that political, social and political priorities are based upon a broad consensus (ibid), defining governance as

the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels and the means by which states promote social cohesion and integration, and ensure the well-being of their populations. It embraces all methods used to distribute power and manage public resources, and the organizations that shape government and the execution of policy. It encompasses the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and resolve their differences. (ibid).

In addition to focus on increased public participation aiming at giving marginalized a voice and influence, good governance is important for promoting a sound investment climate, crucial for creating economic growth. It is also considered to have a two-way relationship with empowerment; indicating that good governance promotes empowerment and empowerment further strengthens good governance (World Bank, 2002:2). Good governance and growth is often analyzed within the aspect of rule of law as the 'availability (...) of impartial, dependable, and reasonable speedy judicial systems and associated enforcement mechanism' (ibid), is important for encouraging investments and thus increasing the potential for economic growth. Kaufmann, Kraay and, Zoido-Lobaton (World Bank, 2002:2) looked into the aspect of rule of law and compared it with the income of nations, and also looked at the relationship between rule of law and higher literacy and reduced infant mortality. They found close and significant relationship between those, demonstrating the potential importance of rule of law in creating development. The World Bank also brings in the aspect of corruption (ibid) and its relationship with poor governance both as a symptom and a cause. Empowering people to more openness and participation in socio-political affairs can contribute to more information of the destructive and widespread occurrence of corruption in

many developing countries, potentially creating popular support to reduce or even eliminate it (ibid). A second area where empowerment plays an important role in enhancing development impact is related to the question of how to make growth benefit the poor (World Bank, 2002: 4). Economic growth alone does not necessarily improve the lives of poor people. But empowerment through inclusion, voice, and accountability (World Bank, 2002:3) can promote the social cohesion and trust necessary to reduce corruption, promote reforms and improve project performance, all which eventually can increase development effectiveness (ibid). The third area where empowerment plays an important role in increasing development effectiveness is in improving the outcomes of development initiatives on project level. Isham, Kaufmann, and Pritchett in World Bank (2002:6) found a strong empirical relationship between empowerment in terms of voice, participation, and civil liberties when they analyzed the performance of 1,500 government projects in more than 50 countries. According to them; the countries with the 'strongest civil liberties had project rates of return that were 8-22 per cent higher than those without' (ibid).

3.8.2 Civil war as development in reverse

The cost of a civil war can be described as a double loss. First, there is an increase in the military budget that require cut in other areas of public spending, then there is all the damage caused by the conflict. According to the World Bank (2003), an average military budget takes 2, 8 per cent of GDP; a percentage that increases to 5 during a civil war. The main economic losses from civil war do not, according to the World Bank (2003), come from 'waste constituted by diverting resources from production, but from the damage that the diverted resources do when they are used for violence'. To start with, there are economic and societal losses in terms of damage in infrastructure such as roads, ports and electricity towers. In addition, vital public buildings like schools and hospitals are often used as barracks or even headquarters for armed forces. Another substantial cost come from the fear that violence causes, both in terms of internal displacement as the 4 million IDPs are a sad evidence of, but also capital flight and reduced investments. A typical civil war country has 9 per cent of its wealth abroad before the conflict starts and 20 per cent by the end of the war (World Bank, 2003:15). Other important factors highlighted by the World Bank that I consider relevant to my thesis are the cases studies from Cambodia, Guatemala, Rwanda and Somalia analyzing the relationship between violent conflict and transformation of social capital, including the social cost of the conflict.

3.8.3 Development, conflict and empowerment

Another empowerment and development issue is related to conflict or terrorism. A report produced by DAC (Development Assistance Committee of the OECD) is called 'A Development Co-operation Lens on Terrorism Prevention'. The Colombian as well as the USA government consider insurgent groups like FARC terrorists (CFR, 2008), and even though I will not go deeper into that discussion, I find the report that is referred to in Atwood interesting as it presents a set of recommended interventions. Among the strategies mentioned to 'dissuade disaffected groups from embracing terrorism and other forms of violent conflict mentioned' (Atwood 2003:163) are:

- Support community-driven development to build the capacity of communities to resist extreme religious or political ideologies
-
- Give greater attention in donor programming to young people's job opportunities and education to prevent the emergence of fragile, disenfranchised youth

- Support democratization and modernization from within local value systems to reconfirm and build the beliefs of societies
- Stay engaged and work in fragile, conflict-prone societies no matter how difficult the partnership may become
- Strive to make globalization an inclusive process, which help reduce support for terrorism. This requires an increased aid effort as well as greater policy coherence

3.9 Management and participation

3.9.1 Managing for empowerment

How to make sure that empowerment and social organization (use of social capital) for development has the desired effect is often a question of managing capacity and ability to seek partnership and alliances with stakeholders that can contribute to increase the chances for success and ensure its sustainability in the long run. How to make empowerment happen has according to Alan Fowler in the book 'Striking a balance' (1997) much to do with organizing and managing for empowerment. In order to enable and empower people working in NGOs, the organizational culture must capture this very approach and all levels of leadership and management must place emphasize on empowerment, especially when recruiting and building the capacity of change agents. For my future thesis, the main change agents will be the local community and their non-formal education and empowerment project for youth. Both adults and youth will probably have participated in making the projects a reality. As well as the projects aiming to enhance empowerment for IDP youth, I consider it possible that the community engagement will empower adults initiating or participating in education projects as well. The term *organizational empowerment* might, as Fowler suggests, can be seen in relationship with the agent's given possibility to act on behalf of those he or she represents. He argues that 'the crux of empowerment for change agents is having the authority to make decisions with communities.' (1997: 85). Mobilizing social capital is according to Putnam in Evans about making use of social networks based upon mutual trust (Evans, 1996 b). Giving community members such authority could therefore be seen in the light of how social capital is mobilized in making alternative education initiatives happen.

3.9.2 Mobilizing non-financial resources and creating synergies

Another work by Alan Fowler relevant for the management aspect is 'The virtuous spiral, a guide to sustainability for NGOs in international development'. In his chapter on mobilizing non-financial resources, he points out the need to identify what complimentary inputs are necessary to make better use of existing assets and potentials in a community (Fowler 2000:44). Fowler's perspective can be described more in depth by looking at the works of Ostrom and her colleagues' that through their concept of "co-production" describes the potential relationship that can be established between the regular "producers" of services and the citizens as "clients". In the case of IDPs in Soacha, where NGOs in many ways might be more present than the state, it is the concept of better synergy and overall output I find relevant more than the public-civic society approach. Co-production is seen as a way of enabling synergy between what a government does and what citizens do (Ostrom 1996:1079), and one instrument for identifying areas for creating synergy is by using functions indicating if the inputs are complementary or not. When the public agents or NGOs and the citizens are sufficiently different in terms of what they can offer and their input is equally necessary, their joint output will be better than if only one of the parties was involved. If this is not the case, there will be little incentives for organizing collective actions (Evans, 1996b).

3.9.3 Popular participation

The word *popular participation* became increasingly important in the development discourse in the 1970s. The meaning behind the word participation has changed the past four decades, both in terms of what it is, and where and when it is integrated in a development context (Cornwall, 2000). It is closely linked to the word empowerment and social capital, and the main reason for including it here is that I consider participation vital in order to ensure that the notion and desired outcome of empowerment is identified together with those who are supposed to benefit from an initiative. Participation can be seen both as a result of empowerment and a driving force making an empowerment process emerge. Cornwall highlights three different perspectives of participation: by, with and between people. In the first, people participate as ‘beneficiaries of development and are called upon to help make contributions to interventions that are intended to benefit them’ where the aim is to increase the effectiveness of these interventions. Participation is then according Cornwall done *for* people, meaning that they are often invited to take part in consultative processes. The second perspective means a process that to a greater degree is owned and controlled by those the development efforts are supposed to benefit. The third participation perspective puts emphasis on a ‘closer relationship between those who work in development and those whom it is intended to benefit (Cornwall, 2000:22). When analyzing and discussing my empirical findings, I will mainly include the second, and in part, the third perspectives.

3.10 Summary

In the first part of this chapter I have presented the theoretical framework for my thesis focusing on theories on empowerment and social capital. I have defined and conceptualized the terms and looked into two different models for measuring impact on empowerment and social capital respectively.

In the second part of this chapter I have gone through my literature review presenting prior research and literature on thematic areas important for the preparations of the fieldwork as well as the application of the theoretical framework in chapter seven where I will discuss and analyze my empirical findings. Areas covered are the relationship between education, empowerment and conflict, development with a specific focus on conflict and civil war, and management, where the aspects of mobilization of social capital and participation are looked into.

4 Methodology



PHOTO: Linda Pérez Bukåsen

4.1 Research strategy

When developing my research proposal, I chose a qualitative research approach for my study. As opposed to a quantitative research strategy, a qualitative strategy emphasizes on an inductive approach, meaning that focus is on generation of theory rather than testing existing theories. It stresses the understanding of the social world through the examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants. In addition, social properties are seen as outcomes of the interactions between individuals rather than a phenomenon taking place separate from those involved in its construction (Bryman, 2004:266). One of the main reasons for this approach is that I was very eager to grasp as much as possible of the interviewee's perspectives (Bryman, 2004: 320). Even though I had several ideas about what transitional education and use of social capital can mean to IDPs in terms of empowerment, I anticipated that there were other factors and perspectives relevant to my research questions that I had not thought of. I also expected that a qualitative approach would provide more detailed and rich answers making it possible to go more in dept with each interviewee. I knew that this flexibility would have its cost. The analysis of the data would be more time consuming and less predictable. Other limitations to qualitative research that I expected were that it often becomes too subjective, and more difficult to duplicate or to make generalizations. In addition, I knew that the research process normally become less transparent than when applying quantitative research, making it more difficult to establish how I came to my conclusions (Bryman, 2004:284-85). Despite these shortcomings, I was convinced that a qualitative approach is the one that will bring me to the answers to my research questions. After conducting my fieldwork, I found very much of this to be true for my experience which I will elaborate more on after accounting for choice of research design, methods for data collection and sampling.

4.2 Research design

Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. The choice of design reflects decisions about the priority given to a range of dimensions of the research process, like expressing casual connections between variables, the potential of generalizing to larger groups of individuals or having a temporal appreciation of social phenomena and their interconnections (Bryman 2004:27). Before I went to Colombia, I identified a comparative framework as the most appropriate for my future study, but I was quite open for whether I wanted to carry out a geographical comparison, or a comparison between different kinds of youth groups (those attending learning circles compared to those attending regular schools or those who drop out). After having my first meeting with the Norwegian Refugee Council in Bogotá, I was informed that the end of the academic year was approaching a lot sooner than I thought, making it more complicated to prepare for and carry out interviews both in learning circles and a regular school, or even more difficult, identify and get permission to interview out school children and youth as many of these were working or alone without their parents during daytime. It would simply not be feasible in terms of the time I had at hand. But two other interesting aspects of comparison emerged: Compare the implementation of two different operational partners and compare the impact of the learning circles in two different neighbourhoods in Soacha. As I decided to go for two different communities operated by two different national organizations, my research design will be comparative from two different angels.

4.3 Methods for data collection

If I have had more time available, I would have considered ethnography or participant observation as it would give me a greater potential of revealing people's real concepts of transitional education and its importance for improving the lives of IDPs and their communities through concepts of 'empowerment', organization and use of social capital. I decided that my main tool for data collection would be semi-structured interviews, combined with focus group interviews, observation and use of existing reports written by international and national NGOs supporting the neighbourhoods I studied. The majority of the individual interviews were carried out with the students, but I also field coordinators, tutors, community leaders and mothers, as they turned out to be more accessible and participatory than fathers. The different stakeholders that I have interviewed will have different interests which affect their answers and point of view. A mother, a tutor or a student might for instance highlight different perspectives when answering to questions about the importance of education. The combination of different methods applied in my data collection is also expected to have affected the nature of the data. A tutor or a mother will not necessarily answer the same during a focus group interview as she or he would during an individual interview. Whereas a focus group interview can trigger ideas and challenge viewpoints through the interactions with others, a one-to-one interview setting can open for more personal reflexions and revelation of more private perceptions and experiences.

4.3.1 Meetings with programme staff at NRC and the operators' offices

During my first weeks in Bogotá, I had meetings with programme staff from Norwegian Refugee Council (two persons), Fundación Escuela Nueva (one person) and Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo (two persons). Their information and answers to my questions are referred to by name and specified as oral source under references. The information they gave me have been important in order to understand the purpose and project design of the learning circles, vital both for preparations and for analyzing the outcome of my findings.

4.3.2 Semi-structural interviews with students

Guided by my research questions, I prepared an *interview guide* of the topics I wanted cover in a more or less similar manner when conducting the interviews with the students. The first interview guide I prepared was based upon a combination of my research questions and the information given by the educational programme manager and Soacha programme officer at Norwegian Refugee Council in Bogota as well as programme staff and field coordinators at Fundación Escuela Nueva and Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo. Aspects from the teaching models relevant for social capital constructions were for instance included in the questioning. After the first visit and initial interviews in Comuna 4, the interview guide was adjusted and amplified.

The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews gave me opportunity to alter the order of the question and pick up the perspective of the interviewee; e. g what he or she considered important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and behaviour (Bryman, 2004:321). This part proved to be more important than I expected. Many of the children told me far more about their life situation than I thought they would. They shared stories of suicide attempts, drug abuse, own and other family members' (ex-) gang membership, domestic violence, sexual abuse and parents that used to be guerrilla soldiers. This way they were adding context to their answers in way that gave me a better understanding of the meaning of the other answers they gave throughout the interviews. But it also made it more difficult to carry out the interview, something that I will get back to in the section where I discuss limitations and ethical dilemmas.

In the beginning, I taped the interviews. After a while, I found it more practical to use my self-developed sort of short-hand as the noise from other students passing by or the playing in the background interfered and made it difficult for me to hear everything that was said on the tape. Since I knew that I probably would not be able to include absolutely everything, I sat down and started writing up the interviews and field notes as soon as I could the same day, sometimes already on the bus back home. This way I feel confident that most of my collected data are intact and have been considered. Nevertheless, it can be argued as a weakness limiting the overall outcome of the thesis.

4.3.3 Focus group interviews

I ended up conducting two simple *focus group interviews* among the tutors, one in each neighbourhood. I use the term 'simple' as it was carried out rather spontaneously for a relatively short time (30-45 minutes) as they had little time due to either meetings in the micro centre or double shifts (in Comuna 6 they had morning and afternoon sessions). I used some of my key questions related to impact on individual as well as community level as departure, and feel that I got the opportunity to learn more about the context that they are working in, and how they consider the role of the learning circle in the community. Using this technique probably made me more able to understand some of their views as they were probing each others comments. As also highlighted in Bryman (2004:348), giving the participants the opportunity to discuss and challenge each others view, probably gave me a more realistic picture of their social reality.

4.3.4 Interviews with tutors, mothers and field personnel

In addition to these group interviews consisting of four tutors in Comuna 4 and five tutors in Comuna 6, I interviewed two tutors separately. They were interviewed with more or less the

same questions as I used for the field coordinator and one of the pedagogical advisors. I also interviewed, in a semi-structural way, three mothers (one in Comuna 4 and two in Comuna 6). In addition I was being present at a chicken committee meeting among three mothers in Comuna 4 (one of them being the mother I also interviewed separately in Comuna 4). After this meeting, I asked the mothers to discuss the impact and importance of the learning circles, so even though it was short (30 minutes) and not planned, their views were interesting and form part of my data collection. In addition to these respondents, I also wanted to interview some community leaders. As the *comedor* – eatery where the children are served hot lunch – in both communities are run and initiated by community leaders, they were selected as community leader respondents.

4.3.5 Prior personal experience

As I highlighted in the introductory part, my previous experience from living with returned refugees in Guatemala and many years of following the conflict in Colombia, has had an impact on the motivation behind my choice of study. But this experience, combined with a number of field visits carried out as an employee in different Norwegian NGOs, have also been a resource when I conducted the fieldwork. Prior experience with displaced and marginalized, fluency in Spanish and knowledge of the Colombian culture probably helped me find an approach that made the process of data collection a bit smoother. My background can also be seen as strength in the process of analyzing the findings, as understanding the complexity of the Colombian context can be quite challenging.

4.3.6 Secondary data

Secondary data sources that have been utilized for this study are an evaluation carried out for Norwegian Refugee Council analyzing the impact of the learning circles operated by three different organizations on community level in Soacha, Santa Marta and Pasto in its initial phase (Gallego, 2006), a needs assessment for Soacha carried out by OCHA (2006), a gender assessment carried out by UNIFEM (Garzón, 2005) and a development plan made by the municipality of Soacha for the period 2008-2011 (Tarquino, 2008).

4.4 Sampling and availability

For this research project I have applied convenience sampling (Bryman, 2004:101), since I realized that counting on the availability of the interviewees with the desired characteristics the days I was present in the communities was the realistic way to go. This sampling method was applied both for the main group of interviewees (students) and for the group of relevant adults linked to the learning circles (field coordinators, tutors, community leaders and mothers). Security matters made it impossible for me to enter alone, so I depended on the days when the field coordinator or tutors could accompany me to and from the highway leading up to the hills of Comuna 4 and Comuna 6. It was not recommended that I stayed later than until 4:30 p.m or after the school day finished (Comuna 4 had only one shift per day, Comuna 6 had two), so I ended up carrying out all the interviews during daytime and near the premises of the learning circles. These circumstances limited my ambitions regarding how representative my samples would be. Upon arrival, I told the tutors that I needed interviewees between 12 and 18 years old, and that they should preferably be IDPs. Looking for these characteristics, the tutors were asked to select randomly among the students present that day, aiming at as even distribution among girls and boys as possible.

Unfortunately, this sampling method makes it difficult to make generalizations as we do not know of what population this sample is representative (Bryman, 2004:100). For instance,

several of the students in Comuna 4 were absent the days I conducted the interviews, many of them IDPs. One reason I was given for this was the upcoming summer vacation. According to the project coordinator and tutors in Comuna 4, some of the IDP students had already left the area, visiting family members outside Soacha. Others had been stopped by the heavy rains the day before that had turned the non-paved roads into a big pile of mud making it difficult to get around. *“There are always fewer students after days of massive rain”*, one of the tutors say. As a result of these matters, I found it difficult to only target IDPs. Another reason was that despite the fact that teachers had identified them as IDPs, they did not necessarily state that they were. Five of the children that I interviewed told me they were born outside Soacha and Bogotá, but said that they were not IDPs. Parents protecting their children from the truth and the stigma of being displaced might be reasons for children being IDPs are claiming that they are not (Personal conversation with field staff). I also found several of the non-IDP interviewees to have interesting cases. Even though they have not been displaced, they live in two areas seriously affected by the internal conflict with high levels of mobility, a substantial IDP-population and strong presence of illegal armed groups, death squads and gangs. These children might not have experienced being forcibly uprooted and witnessed mass-killings, but they are poor, marginalized and are living with the consequences of the internal conflict every day. And even though they have not been displaced by force, they might come from migrant families looking for a better life closer to the capital Bogotá. Many of the challenges they face and will face in the future are similar to those of the IDPs. For these reasons, the actual target group should be seen as ‘IDPs and poor and deprived children’, not only ‘IDPs’. It is however important to note that IDPs face additional challenges and have perhaps more reasons for being in the learning circles than the poor and deprived children. Since they are often displaced due to a an intensification of the conflict, their escape is less planned and increases the chances of their reason for arriving throughout the academic year, making access to school difficult many places.

Despite that my initial target group was IDPs between 12 and 15 years of age, I also ended up lowering the ages a bit. After finishing in Comuna 4, I realized that I had a lot fewer IDPs than I thought I needed. By widening the age range in Comuna 6, I got a larger group to choose from. And in fact, I became positively surprised by the change. The 10 year olds I interviewed turned out to be just as reflective as the older ones, and perhaps even more open in their answers. I also interviewed an 18 year old IDP student. Age does matter, but personality, family background and displacement history played a greater role than I anticipated. I ended interviewing a total of 32 children and youth. 18 of these said they are IDPs.

Age distribution among the interviewed students

Comuna 4: (14 respondents)

9: 0
10: 0
11: 0
12: 5
13: 5
14: 1
15: 3
16: 0
17: 0
18: 0

Comuna 6 (18 respondents)

9: 3
10: 3
11: 3
12: 1
13: 4
14: 2
15: 1
16: 0
17: 0
18: 1

I ended up interviewing an evenly amount of girls and boys, meaning that there were 16 girls among the interviewees and 16 boys. Even though I expressed that I was wanted to have an even distribution as possible, I count myself lucky to get a perfect distribution as the tutors also had to keep track of age, IDP-status and actual presence when helping me select interviewees. If we look at community level, the distribution is not as even as the overall sample. In Comuna 4, the number of boys was higher (eight boys and six girls) whereas in Comuna 4, the number of girls was higher with ten girls and eight boys.

4.5 Challenges during sampling and interviewing

I approached two neighbourhoods affected by a broad range of social problems including poverty, violence, prostitution, drug trafficking and other criminal activities. Luckily, I was introduced by the field coordinators from both operators, and this made access and accept a lot easier. The tutors openness and willingness to collaborate in selecting interviewees was also crucial. Without the help and presence of the tutors and the coordinators, it would have been very difficult to carry out the field work, both with respect to gaining trust and due to security matters. Without speaking Spanish fluently, it would have been impossible to carry out the interviews without interpreter. Regardless of these benefits, I met some challenges during my fieldwork. Due to the upcoming summer vacation starting unexpectedly early and the need for field staff accompany me and tutors to help me select interviewees, I had to get started with my interviews earlier than anticipated. This resulted in my first trip to the field being done before the interview guide was completely finished. Even though this might have affected the quality of the first 5-6 interviews, I chose to include them. Many of the things they told me about their lives and perception of the learning circles were interesting, and I needed them in order to have the possibility of comparing the findings in the two communities. If I had left out almost half of the twelve interviews I carried out in Comuna 4 before they closed the learning circles for two months, I would have had fewer data to work with.

Another challenge that arose that had partly to do with the limitations of the amount of time spent in the communities was to gain trust. This was particularly the case in the first community, Comuna 4, and might be related to the fact that I was new in the field and still did not feel 100 % comfortable of my role as a researcher. Even though I think that several of the children would have been reluctant and careful about what they were saying, I prefer to include this aspect as it might have affected the nature of the empirical findings. Several of the interviewees stated for instance that they knew nothing about gangs or illegal armed groups. Some simply stated that they do not exist there, whereas all reports, field coordinators, tutors and the rest of the students claimed they were abundant. Even though some children might be more protected at home than other, or other again are new and do not know too much about what is going on, not being aware of the presence and activities of these groups seems unlikely considering how widespread their presence seem to be (Garzón 2005, OCHA, 2006). I have therefore concluded that most of the answers related to such non-existence are related to lack of trust or fear by telling me this. Questions like those related to the different actors in the conflict, gangs and drug trafficking are for many highly sensitive, and a survival strategy might be a “see nothing, hear nothing” attitude.

Regarding the extended range of age between the interviewees, I was as mentioned positively surprised by the younger students’ openness and ability to reflect. It is however important to

mention that the age difference might have affected their understanding of the questions and also to what extent their answers are directly comparable of those of the older students.

4.6 Analysis of data

According to Bryman (2004) there are two main strategies for analyzing data; analytic induction and grounded theory. Both are iterative meaning that there is a repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data, and can be seen as a strategy both for collection and analysis. As the first seeks universal explanation by pursuing the collection of data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation of a phenomenon is found, grounded theory 'is derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another (Strauss and Corbin in Bryman, 2004:401). Even though the latter is time consuming too, I considered this strategy more feasible than the first. Coding became an important tool, meaning that I needed to 'label, separate, compile, and organize data' in order to make sense of my findings. According to Strauss and Corbin in Bryman (2004:402); there are three methods of coding; open (breaking down, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data), axial (data put together in new ways after open coding in order to make connections between categories) and selective (selecting a core category and then relate it to other categories). All three steps have been carried out when found appropriate and will be described in the section where I present my empirical findings.

4.7 Reliability and validity

Reliability (whether the results are repeatable) and validity (integrity of the conclusions that are generated from the research) are important criteria in social research but is mainly geared to quantitative research than qualitative research (Bryman, 2004:28) which is my choice of research strategy. Some argue that the questions of reliability and validity are irrelevant in qualitative research; others propose alternative criteria such as trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba and Lincoln in Bryman, 2004:273). Trustworthiness is made up by four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The importance of 'multiple accounts of social reality' is particularly visible in the criterion of credibility (Bryman, 2004:275) as it includes both ensuring good practise and expects the members of the social world that is studied is presented with the findings so that they can have a chance to confirm that the investigator correctly have understood that social world. I will only partly fulfil this part as translating and presenting the findings in a child-friendly easily accessed format is not feasible within the resources and the time that I have at hand. The operators and Norwegian Refugee Council as well as the tutors will be presented with the final report, and since they also, at least partly, belong to the social world studied, the aspect of credibility is at least taken into consideration.

As for transferability, I have – typically for a qualitative research approach - focused on as rich description of the two communities as possible. The context studied are unique, and whether these findings will 'hold in some other context or even the same context at some other time' will, as Guba and Lincoln cited in Bryman (2004:275) be an 'empirical issue'. That I rather provide rich descriptions can be seen as a database for making judgements of whether my findings are transferrable to other contexts (ibid). The third aspect, dependability, refers to an 'auditing approach' which entails that the researcher ensures that 'complete records are kept throughout all phases of the research process' (ibid), inviting peers to act as auditors. Since this study is part of thesis and not a bigger research project, I do not consider this aspect as necessary. All records the fieldwork are kept though, and will be kept for longer

period of time in case they can be of any use. The fourth criteria related to trustworthiness is confirmability which, by acknowledging the fact that complete objectivity not is possible in qualitative research, rather focuses on good faith (Bryman, 2004:276). I have done what ever I could to not allow my personal values or theoretical expectations, so even though I cannot guarantee 100 % objectivity, my intentions have been to do my very best to get as close I can.

The second criteria, authenticity is related to issues the wider impact of the research carried out (ibid) and includes fairness (if the research fairly represents the views among the members of the communities that I studied), ontological authenticity (does the research help the members of the communities to get a better understanding of the context?), educative authenticity (does the research help members appreciate more the perspectives of other members of their social setting), catalytic authenticity (has the research engaged members in actions of change?) and tactical authenticity (has the research empowered members to take necessary action?). By stating that I was seeking to interview students and mothers with certain characteristics (IDPs, belonging to a certain age group, available at the time of the interviews), I have certainly excluded some members from participating, I even had to reject some that did not fulfil the last age criteria I set (younger than nine). Within the framework and time frame set though, I did what I could to ensure fairness also because I considered that to be important in ensuring that the findings actually say something that is, even though hard to measure, representative for the members of the communities - in this case meaning students at the learning circles, their mothers and the tutors/field staff). As for the other criteria, it is hard to tell whether my research have had any impact. Being interviewed about important aspects of their lives; might have made some of the students, mothers or tutors think about aspects related to their lives in the communities (ontological). The fact that several of the students told me personal stories more or less related to the questions, might underpin this. The same might be said about the educational authenticity, even though I would not put to much emphasis on my relatively short interviews and focus group interviews either. For catalytic and tactical authenticity, I must be modest and say that I think my research have done little in this respect. All in all, the aspects of alternatives to reliability and validity have been discussed and taken into considerations. The limitations in scope and size of the studies, and methods for data collection in the field, made some of the ideal aspects of ensuring the criteria hard to meet.

4.8 Confidentiality and anonymity

The names of the two neighbourhoods have been substituted by the number of the sector they belong to, Comuna 4 and Comuna 6. This way I hope to have balanced my objective of protecting my informants with the need for visualizing some of the specific, contextual challenges that these two sectors of Soacha are faced with. All students have been given coded acronyms whenever I have referred to what they told me. Before starting to conduct the interview, students, parents, tutors signed a confidentiality agreement (see appendix 1). I have also chosen to protect the identity of community leaders and field staff such as coordinators and pedagogical advisors. The pictures that are used throughout the thesis are taken from mainly non-interviewed students. I have chosen not to name the communities or the place where they are when the photo is taken as an extra precaution. When information given from programme staff at the organizations' offices in Bogotá form part of the organizations' 'public view', these sources are referred to by their real names.

4.9 Ethical considerations and limitations

As I mentioned when writing about research design, I was surprised by the openness of some of the children with respect to life situation. Knowing how to handle a 12 year old high on drugs or a nine year old girl that tells you about rape is difficult. Having signed the confidentiality report with the student, I could not just go straight to the teacher and ask if they knew and what they did about it. Luckily the pedagogical/family advisors and the teachers know quite a lot about their students, and follow some of them up very closely. But I could not be sure if this was the case with all my respondents, so the best solution I could find was to spend some of the time to listen and talk, and to ask if they had been given help and if any of the tutors or advisors working in the learning circles knew. And if not, advise them to do so if they felt there was someone they could trust. I was probably stepping a bit out of my role as a researcher, and this might have affected my findings to a certain extent, both the information I obtained and the way I interpret it. Other children, more careful about what they share, might have had similar stories unrevealed, but will not be analyzed by me in the same manner. Nevertheless, I cannot see that I could have acted differently. Interviewing vulnerable children requires respect for their unusual life stories in a way that must open for the human aspect in an interview setting, something which is backed by Save the Children's publication "So you want to consult with children?" (2003).

Since the children had different backgrounds and personalities, and showed me different levels of trust, the ability of going in depth and even beyond the interview guide varied from interview to interview. In some cases it will be difficult to make direct comparison between interviewees, and between the two communities. The more I got to know about the field and the more experienced I became in tackling the interview situation, the more I was able to read their body language, interpret their answers and pick up important threads for further questioning.

Interviewing the children on the premises of the learning circles or nearby, might have affected the way they chose to answer, especially on the questions related to the perceived benefits and limitations with the learning circles. The fact that I was accompanied by field staff following up the learning circles, made have given the children an impression that I represented them despite my efforts of explaining them that I was an external person and that the information was confidential. It is therefore important to keep in mind that some of the answers can have been given in the way they expected me to want them. That the tutors helped select the interviewees might have further strengthened this aspect. In addition are the tutors' interpretation of my inquiry and their personal view on each student likely to have affected their selection. As already mentioned, I stopped taping the interviews due to noise interference. Even though I sought other ways of absorbing my data, some of the aspects of what they told me might have been missed. This could weaken my understanding of the findings and therefore also the final analysis.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter I have presented my choice of research strategy including research design and methods for data collection. I explained how the interviewees have been sampled and presented some of the challenges I met during sampling and interviewing. I have also presented the chosen approach for analysis of data and discussed issues of reliability and validity related to the research strategy that has been applied. In addition, I have included aspects of confidentiality, anonymity, ethical considerations and limitations for the study.

5 Empirical findings

*“I would like to continue here. If I will ever have kids, I would like them to study here.”
JO (15), Comuna 6*



PHOTO: Linda Pérez Bukåsen

As stated in the introductory part, **the main objective** of my research was to *assess to what extent learning circles are enabling young IDPs children to improve their situation and life chances, and if social capital, particularly among the children is used or constructed through attendance and other engagement in learning circles.*

The sub-objectives were to assess the perceived benefits, limitations and alternatives to the learning circles, to investigate how forces within social capital affect the impact of the learning circles and to identify if the ability of young IDPs to make effective choices (to be empowered) is improved by the learning circles. When presenting the findings, I will refer to which of the questions that corresponds with the research questions which after small adjustments were the following:

1. Why do the young IDPs drop out from the regular education system?
2. What are considered alternatives to attending learning circles?
3. What are perceived as the benefits from attending learning circles?
4. Have the young IDPs attending learning circles experienced changes in their own attitudes, behaviour and achievements?
5. What are considered the limitations and challenges with learning circles?
6. To what degree and in what manner are the IDPs making the learning circles an integrated part of the community?
7. What kind of social networks and local institutions are the IDPs involved in?

Structure of the presentation of empirical findings

First, I will provide a short presentation describing some characteristics of the students attending the learning circles. Then I will include a brief part on my initial questions and approach before presenting the empirical findings. I have chosen to divide the section of findings in two main parts. Part one summarizes the interviews with the students with respect to three main categories: Access to education, perceived impact from the learning circles, and participation and social groups and networks. Part two looks into the aspects of learning circle impact and social capital formation on community level. Interviews with field personnel, tutors, parents and community leaders will be included when relevant.

The students attending learning circles

Providing a general description of the students is not easy as they are comprised of a group of children with different family backgrounds, experiences and personalities. Yes, they do share many of the same experiences and challenges, but that does not necessarily make the respondents appear as one, homogenous group. I met a 15 year old who could barely write his name and who did not remember his surname, and a 10 year old girl that appeared more mature than most of the others. Some were very open; others were shy or more uncomfortable. Some showed trust from the very beginning while others carefully think things through before answering or provided an answer that appeared to be safe rather than honest. Except from those who were timid and reluctant, many showed signs of being pleased to be asked questions or perhaps even more so, given attention from an adult. Some told me a lot more about their life experiences and went far beyond the questions raised in the interview guide, such as telling me stories of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The students are taught in a multi-grade environment and were sitting around tables organized according to their level of knowledge rather than age. In some of the rooms, the students appeared well-organized and calm, greeting me, the intruder, with a welcoming committee showing me the friendship-box, the values that they work after which are displayed on the wall and travelling note book. In other rooms, the environment could be more chaotic, loud and a lot of action and groups of children approach me with tons of questions. The dynamic sometimes seem to differ from day to day, depending upon the task they are working on, even though each group I visited seemed to have their own groups dynamic.

Many of the children I interviewed told me that they lived with a single mother or with their mother and a step-father. According the students as well as the tutors, field staff and the mothers themselves, many mothers are unemployed or work in informal sector. Only one of the students told me that she lived alone with her father after they had been forced to flee and leave the rest of the family behind. Most of the students have at least one sister or brother, many have several. Not all have the same two parents. Many of the students tell stories about a young sister or brother who live with relatives somewhere else either due displacement, education, the economic situation or a combination of all three. Several of the students (15) interviewed report that they have one or more sisters and brothers that also attend learning circles.

Initial questions given to the students

I started the interviews by asking the student's name, age and where he or she was born/from. I also asked them directly if they are IDPs; that way I could compare the fact that they were born or stated that they came from another part of Colombia, with their IDP/non-IDP status. I also asked them if they had attended normal school before, and what grade they were in. This basic information helped me exclude irrelevant questions (for instance not asking a girl that never had attended a regular school what she liked the most; going to a normal school or

attending the learning circles) and to smoothly prepare the student for more reflective questions. Initially I was a bit worried about asking the student about their IDP-status right away as this topic might be loaded with stigma, trauma or at least strong emotions. After a while I found out that most children were more open than I expected and had been warned about before entering the communities.

As many of the questions were open-ended, many students gave more than one answer.

PART 1: Access, impact and participation

5.1 Access to education

The question of access is first of all applicable to the two first research questions; why young IDPs drop out of the traditional education system, and what the alternatives to education are. The question of access is also relevant to the research question treated the second category, perceived impact, as improved access due to learning circles is among one of the direct benefits. One of the first questions I asked the students was why they were attending learning circles in stead of a regular school. There are several reasons why children access learning circles, and some of the students have therefore given more than one answer. For instance, they could say that there were no placements or that they were not accepted due to their age. Later in the interview, some of them would say that the best thing about the learning circle is that everything is for free, and that lack of money is a problem for them and their family. This indicates that the parents might have multiple reasons for choosing the learning circle, and that the answer the students have given me reflects what occurs to them as their main reason(s) for being in the learning circle and not in a regular school. The reasons for being out of the school system are also often interrelated. Lack of money can for instance be the parents' reason for asking their children to work for a living in stead of attending school as well as not being able to afford the cost of a uniform.

The majority of the students – twelve in total - stated that their reason for being in the learning circle is that they do not have to spend money on tuition fee, note books, transport or buying uniform. Nine of the students said that lack of placements (normally at the mother school or another nearby, public school) was their reason for not being in a normal school. Of these nine, three of them pointed out that their reason for not being allowed access was because they arrived during the academic school year. Four of the students told that their age or a long period of absence from the traditional school system was their reason for choosing the learning circle. Some of these were not accepted because of the mismatch between their age and the grade they corresponded to. Five said that they entered the learning circles by choice either as a result of an invitation or recommendation, or because of bad treatment by teachers in a normal school. Three of the students stated that lack of diplomas/documentation from previous schooling or ID papers were their reason for entering the learning circles.

Another aspect related to access was what the students would do if they did not have the chance to attend a learning circle, thus establishing the importance of the learning circles for this child's educational opportunities. In addition to getting an idea of importance of the learning circles for their education, I wanted to find out what they think they would do without this offer. Eight of the interviewees said that they would do nothing/stay at home while four said they would work, meaning that 12 thought that the alternative would be no education. Six said that they would look for placement in another school and two would look

for someone else to teach them or study at home, leaving eight of the students with the expectations or hopes of being able to find an alternative. Another two said that they did not know, one of them referring to the difficulties in finding placements in other schools. I also asked the same question to the tutors, parents, pedagogical advisor and field coordinators. Most highlighted the importance of learning circles due to few other opportunities, and fewer of the adults than the children taught finding placement outside the learning circles would be a realistic alternative. In addition, they were more specific in what they thought the students would be doing outside the home when not having an educational offer to attend to. While the students more specifically answered the question by referring to what they believed they would do (stay at home or look for placements in another school), the adults working in and with the circles and the parents also highlighted the dangers of being outside a school environment. Even though the tutors and field staff expressed that some of children would stay at home because their parents said they should or because they would not dare to be out, they also thought that many would enter the streets and become easy targets for those who look to recruit children to do drugs and/or join gangs and illegal armed groups.

A key finding with respect to access should thus be seen in the light of lack of other opportunities. Without the learning circles, many of the students would probably still be outside the school system.

5.2 Perceived impact

In order to analyze the students' perceived impact of the learning circles, I developed the following research questions:

What are perceived as the benefits from attending learning circles?

Have the young IDPs attending learning circles experienced changes in their own attitudes, behaviour and achievements?

What are considered the limitations and challenges with learning circles?

In order to get an answer to this, my guiding questions were related to what they say they have learned in the circles compared to in the normal school, and how they perceive the learning environment and its impact on them and what they achieve. My aim was to identify positive and negative aspects of both educational institutions.

The intention behind the initial questions within this category was to try to grasp the student's understanding and appreciation of the Escuela Nueva methodology, particularly with respect to the child-centred approach, emphasis on values and the children's reality, working in groups and encouraging child participation through committees, presentations and giving them the responsibility of registering their presence and absence. Do they perceive a difference in methodology and learning environment? Do they note the difference in the way the teachers treat them? Do they feel that they receive more respect? Do they feel more confident? Do they perceive a sounder learning environment? After summarizing the answers to these questions, I will present what the students said did not like and what they considered difficult with the learning circles.

5.2.1 Benefits and changes in attitudes, behaviour and achievements

Pedagogy and methodology

The vast majority referred to the pedagogy and methodology as *chévere*, *vacano* or *bueno* which can be translated as ‘cool’, ‘nice’ and ‘good’. Many referred to the tutors’ approach in their teaching: That they are patient, that they explain over again and that they teach the children with respect. They are considered friendly and open, for many very different from the experience they had in the normal school system. As for their earlier school experience, they often described their previous teachers as *gritones* – meaning that they yell at you – and *regañones*; that they are scolding you. Others referred to values (respect, love, responsibility), friendship and self esteem; and to the guides as a part of their positive perception of the methods that the tutors apply. Only two of the students report that they are negative to the pedagogy. One stated that she does not like the guides (but she likes the other books they use), another thought that the tutors are too busy to explain well, and that this was better in her previous school. As far as I know, she was one of very few that used to attend a private school before becoming displaced, meaning that she can have been used to a different standard than many of the others that mostly had few good experiences from the traditional school system.

Perceptions of difference between a regular teacher and learning circle tutor

The most frequent answer to this question was centred on how they perceive the traditional school teacher’s way of treating them compared to that of the tutors. Many of the students mentioned scolding, yelling and aggressive behaviour among the teachers to be the main difference. Six from Comuna 4 and four from Comuna 6 shared this view. Considering that I interviewed a higher number of children in Comuna 6 than Comuna 4, the share of student’s with this view is relatively seen higher in Comuna 4. Other answers reflecting negative aspects of the teachers’ way of conducting their role as educators is linked to physical punishment (two students), being denied going to the toilet during class (one student) and teachers who lie or do not collaborate (one student). Similar answers are also given from the opposite angle; that the tutors in the learning circles are a lot *nicer* than the teachers. They give more attention, are friendlier, more helpful and explain when the students are in doubt. This view is also backed in findings from the previous question looking into the methods applied and other questions later in this section, such as the one asking the students what they like about the learning circles. Some very few students say that there is no difference, and only two had negative comments. One expressed a wish that the tutors should have informed his parents about his drug abuse:

“In a regular school they would have told your parents, and not only talked to you”.

Another said that that the difference lies in how the tutors make you use only one notebook, whereas a traditional teacher would require one notebook for each subject.

Positive aspects of the learning circle

In both communities the tutors and their way of teaching and treating the students were regarded as what the majority of the students highlighted as what they liked the most about the learning circles (five students in Comuna 4 and six in Comuna 6). Next to the tutors, friendship with classmates is regarded highest when looking at the total score which is six. What is noteworthy is that while five of the students in Comuna 4 mentioned friendship with

fellow students, only one of the Comuna 6-students put emphasis on this part when they answered my question. The two communities are also different with respect to emphasis on the learning experience. Five of the Comuna 4 community stated that what they like about the learning circle is to study and learn, while only one student in Comuna 6 highlighted the same. Another aspect that is highlighted by the students is that they like working with the guides (four students) or that they value the use of the friendship mail and the travelling notebook (two students). Others mention the fact that learning circles helps children out of school by getting them back to the normal school system. Others again mention the activities in the committees or projects such as the herb garden and the chicken project.

Perceived achievements and changes in behaviour

The students were asked what they have learned in the learning circles that they had not learned before. The answers given can be divided into two main categories: Those related to cognitive skills, for instance how to master or make improvements in a subject (read, write and mathematics) and those related to the development of social skills such as values, collaborative skills and handling relationships with others. All the students in Comuna 4 who got this question answered “yes”; they had achieved something during their time in the learning circles that they had not achieved before. In Comuna 6 all except from three answered the same. Two of those simply stated “no”, while one was not sure. In Comuna 4, three answered that they had learned how to read and write, and one of these also included improved abilities in mathematics. In Comuna 6, the number of students answering within this category was seven (four improve or learn how to read and write, three improving mathematics). In Comuna 6, two of the students also mentioned working with guides, which requires both cognitive and social skills as group work and working with values is an important part of the curricula and methodology. Within the social skills categories, four in Comuna 4 highlighted achievements in terms of making friends or getting better along with others. Among these were both ex-gang members who both told they had become better at making friends and maintaining friendship, one of them adding that he had learned to keep off the streets. In Comuna 6, the emphasis on friendship was not the same as none stated making friends among their achievements. Emphasis was however given on related areas such as “*to dialogue with people*”, “*respect my mother*”, “*respect others*” and “*take care of others*”. In addition, two in each community identified changes in their behaviour (e. g towards learning and others) or to behave well among their achievements. Other achievements mentioned were to work in group (one in each community) and work in committees (one in Comuna 4). Three of the students in Comuna 6 also highlighted more general, educational achievement such as “*to manage my homework*”, “*to be prepared for the normal school*” and not to forget one of my last interviewees who was excited when she cried out “*I am about to start secondary school!!!*” (ZJ, 14).

Attitudes towards education – before and after the learning circles

When the students were asked about how they liked going to school before entering the learning circles, the distribution between “*I liked it*” and “*I did not like it*” was quite evenly distributed if we look at the overall distribution of the figures: Nine said they did not like it, ten said they did. If we look at the distribution on community level, there is a sharp distinction between the students as only two students in Comuna 4 liked going to school (one of these expressed “a lot” though), while nine in Comuna 6 stated the same. Reasons given for those who liked going to school were that they were taught a lot of things (gymnastics, cultivating vegetables and tending animals) or that there were no drugs there. When it comes to the group that said they did not like to go to school, the figures are more even again: Four in Comuna 4, five in Comuna 6. Considering that the number of respondents in Comuna 6 is higher than in

Comuna 4; the result can be seen as pretty much the same on community level. Reasons given for not enjoying going to school were mainly related to scolding. Other reasons given were other class mates bothering them or that they considered the teaching as boring. Just as one of those who liked the normal school expressed that she liked it a lot, one of those who disliked it expressed that 'it was really bad'. The main reason for this was scolding and physical punishment in the class room.

After asking this question, I went on asking how they felt about the learning circles and also asked them to indicate what they liked the most if they had a preference. Twelve of the students said that they liked the learning circle more than the regular school. Their reasons varied from *"There is not as much scolding here"*, *"It is a bit better than the regular school"* and *"Here I do not have problems with the tutors, in the other school I was a troublemaker"* (KP, 15 years old), to *"I think it is very nice"* and *"I do not want to go back to a regular school"*. One of the students said that the learning circle was easier than the normal school; another said he felt safer in the learning circles. Others said they liked learning circles and thought they are "good" or "OK", and among the reasons given were the argument *"because they give me an opportunity to continue study and improve my life"* and *"Here there is no punishment"*. Others again said they were satisfied, but that they liked it more before. *"Here the kids are rude. I have had fights with my class mates. They have also hit my little brother. In the other school I never had trouble"*, NB (11) said. *"OK, but I do not like that I have to walk because we have to pass through dark places. It is frightening"*, TU (10) said. Two of the interviewees said that they find the learning circles different, one of them still said he likes it more. Finally, one finds attending the learning circles difficult due to the drugs and bad friendships. All in all, a large number of the students seem to be more satisfied with the learning circles.

5.2.2 Limitations and challenges with the learning circles

The difference in methodology takes time to learn, and some of the students might miss what they used to have, at least in the beginning. In addition, many parents are reported by the tutors and some of the students to be sceptical to the pedagogy thinking that the children are playing around and do not have enough homework. The fact that many of the children attending are traumatized through displacement and violence and have been outside the school system for a while, the teaching environment in some of the circles might be challenging and a bit rough. By these questions I wanted to redress if they see any difficulties of any kind.

Negative aspects of the learning circles

Many simply said that there is nothing they do not like about the circles, and this figure is quite evenly distributed between the two communities – seven in Comuna 4, eight in Comuna 6. Considering the difference in number of interviewees, the level of satisfaction can be seen as a bit higher in Comuna 4. Making generalizations about dislikes is quite hard as all except from class mates being rude and the fighting (stated by two students each), was highlighted by only one student each. Nevertheless, I find it important to include the factors that they mention. An afro-Colombian student mentions that he is met with racism by some of his class mates. Another (with a drug problem) emphasized the problem with drug abuse telling me that he was obliged to try drugs when he, through another student in the learning circle, was accepted into a gang. He has now left the gang but find it very hard to quit doing drugs as the one who got him involved is still studying in the same circle. Other aspects that are mentioned are lack of uniform (*"Even though we are poor, we should not be attending the circles without uniform"*, one of the girls said) too little attention by the tutor, the guides and lack of gymnastics. The latter used to be offered in Comuna 4, but has now stopped. When I asked

the mothers the same question, one said that she did not like the fact that there are children from all kinds of families and classes attending, and that many of the parents are not following up their children. She would have liked that there were a better psychology offer targeting the most troubled children as they negatively affects the others (ME, Comuna 4). Two of the mothers I interviewed (one in each community) also expressed that they would have liked to see improvements in the *comedor* where the students eat lunch. Even though they appreciate the offer, they would have liked their children to eat more proteins. One of the mothers in Comuna 6 also said that she would have liked her children to use one note book for each subject and not have just two note books for all subjects.

Challenges within the learning circles

By asking this question, my aim was to detect if the students were facing any particular challenges within the learning circle. I was not thinking of difficult in terms of subjects, but more in terms of the way it operates and its pedagogy and methodology. When analyzing the answers it becomes clear that several of those that actually mentions difficulties, think of challenges with a subject, especially mathematics. Four of the students in Comuna 4 mentioned this aspect while one in Comuna 6 did. Another difficulty that was highlighted by the students was the other class mates. Even though many highlighted friendship as an important part of what they like about their time in the learning circles, three of the students (two from Comuna 6 and one from Comuna 4) considered one or several of their classmates as difficult to handle or be around. One of them highlighted bad friendship related to drug abuse and gang membership, and said this persons' presence in the circle is what makes it difficult to stop taking drugs. One girl in Comuna 6 mentioned the flow of new students coming throughout the school year as difficult:

“Often I get better along with those who started together with me since we have known each other since the beginning” (NB, 12 years old).

The vast majority of the students did not identify any difficulties at all though. In Comuna 4, four said that there is nothing, while the number in Comuna 6 is as high as 13 out of 18.

5.2.3 Hopes and aspirations for the future

Here my intention was to see if the students reflect over the differences between the normal school and the learning circles, and how they consider the knowledge and the additional tools they learn to use will serve in the future. According to the field coordinators and tutors, many of the children re-entering the regular school system through a mother school after a period in a learning circle initially feel it as a shock to be back in a more traditional system. But surveys carried out shows that after a while their problem-solving approach and not just writing down what the teacher tells them to (Ayala, 2008) gives the student advantages in the learning process through e. g more developed analytical skills. Even though most of the students I interviewed still have some time left in the learning circles before they are considered ready for the mother school, I wanted to see if they at this point considered themselves prepared. I also wanted them to reflect around their possibilities for acquiring education beyond primary school, how they consider their future career opportunities to be like and if they believe that what they learn will help them in other areas of their lives than just those of school and work.

Importance of the learning circles

What most students highlighted when I asked this question was their possibility of getting back to the regular school system again, not surprising compared to the findings presented in paragraph 5.1 previously in this chapter. Six of the Comuna 6 students and three from

Comuna 4 included this aspect in their answer. Another aspect that was appreciated by many is general learning or improving subject(s) such as mathematics. Five in Comuna 6 and two in Comuna 4 mentioned this. A third area that was referred to by several is its overall potential to contribute to a future career. Three of the students in Comuna 6 and two in Comuna 4 covered this area. In addition, a number of aspects were mentioned by one or only a few students. One of these is the general *salir adelante* – to move ahead - which was mentioned by three, another one was to help younger family members with their education (two students). Other aspects highlighted were to be able to take better care of one self, to have better values or to become more dedicated (one each). Even though most answers were positive, two girls expressed discontent when answering this question. The first one said “*I used to know how to multiply, but now I have forgotten*”. The other one said “*Not much. I have forgotten most of the things I used to know*”. From this, I find it reasonable to conclude that the most prevalently perceived benefit among the students is their access back into the formal school system even though the learning and improving cognitive skills are viewed as important too. This corresponds well with what the operators as well as others identify as one of the main concerns with respect to IDPs and deprived children’s challenges with education: Access and an educational offer that will help you further in the future (Save the Children, 2007, Hjarrand, 2008).

Importance of education for their future

All of the students I interviewed had a positive perception of the importance of education for their future. Most used the labels “*very important*” or “*important*”. In Comuna 4 six stated that they considered it “*very important*”, whereas four in Comuna 6 used the same term. As for the label “*important*”, this was utilized by ten students in Comuna 6 and five in Comuna 4. Out of this, one could argue that the students in Comuna 4 put slightly more emphasis on the importance than the students in Comuna 6. Also other terms was used to express level of importance, for instance “*I can become someone in life*”, “*I can achieve something and become intelligent*” and “*I can improve my life*”. These terms used both alone and to describe why the students believed that education is important for their future. The most common attributes to describe the nature of “*important*” or “*very important*” was to *salir adelante*. This is a widely used expression by the students, but normally covers main aspect of their lives and aspirations: In order to move ahead, they need to stay out of trouble, find a job and make a career. Many underpinned their statement by referring to their need to complete primary school and/or high school to achieve this; others highlighted their need and wish for more knowledge, in order to not “*live your life as an ignorant*” as WJ (18) expressed it. One girl, ZJ (14), also mentioned the importance of being able to express her self well and to not be vulgar, something that she has learned in the learning circle.

Perceived chances of completing primary and secondary school

Absolutely all students in Comuna 4 think they will complete primary school. Given that they are now entitled to enrolment at a mother school, this finding is perhaps not very surprising. But factors like parents that might need them at home or the prospects of their parents planning to move again do worry some. In Comuna 6, one of the girls said: “*I do not think so. I do not think my mother will let me. I do no know for sure, but I never last long in a school. Because of my parents*”, NB (11). In an evaluation report carried out by the Norwegian Refugee Council on the children attending Fundación Apoyar’s (another operator) learning circles in Soacha, 105 out of 135 students in a given period of time had been matriculated at a mother school (Gallego, 2006:9) indicating that 30 students for various reasons did not. Even though most of the Comuna 6 students were positive too, they did not seem as sure as the

students in Comuna 4. Two said “*I think so*”, the third said it remains to be seen and the fourth said if the lacking papers are retrieved.

Considering the long term perspective that this question imply for many, it is surprising to see that the students seem even more positive towards their anticipated possibility of completing secondary school than when given the previous question. Perhaps the preceding question gave them more time to think and also fuelled their eagerness to make wishful thinking. Throughout the interview, and particularly in the questions to come, this tendency became noteworthy: If you believe something might happen, it will. Or if you work hard enough, you will be rewarded. All the students in Comuna 4 believed that they would complete secondary school, even though one included “*if God wishes*” and another one said “*Yes, if I prepare myself well it is possible*”. As for Comuna 6, the number in doubt is reduced from four to two, and the only one that does not believe she will, is the same that did not believe she would complete primary either.

Perceptions of future career and work opportunities

The reason for asking about whether they believe they will find job in the future, was to detect level of optimism and hope for the future. All of the students in Comuna 4 answered yes when I asked them if they thought they would find work in the future. 15 of the students in Comuna 6 answered the same, two said they “*did not know*” and the last one answered “*maybe*” The positive (“yes”) answer is often conditional and related to future study opportunities, particularly when they talk about a specific career that they would like have if they are given the means to make it happen. Some appear confident “*because I am going to study*” while others are more insecure stating “*if I am lucky enough to get access to higher studies*” or “*if God wishes*”.

Perceived relevance of learning social skills

My reason for trying to establish if the students considered what they learn in the learning circle as important for others aspects of their lives, is because of the operators’ objectives to contribute to empowerment of the students through focus on participation and rights, such as giving emphasis on involving the students in committees and independent student governments. Several did not understand this question. I tried to rephrase or explain, but there were still many that did not get what I wanted to know: Do you think what you learn is only valid for your professional life or do you think what you learn will empower you as a citizen, e. g making you more able to claim you rights fulfilled, and even function in the society such as vote, approach public offices and raise their children. Of those who fully understood the question, several highlighted the importance of being able to help their future children or even their own younger sisters and brothers with their homework and in their upbringing (three in Comuna 4, three in Comuna 6). Some of the students tell me that their parents have little education and have thus limited opportunities to help them with homework, and therefore see this aspect as important if and when they are going to become a parent themselves. As one of the girls from Comuna 6 expressed it:

“Because I can teach my children and give them advice, my mother cannot do that. She has only completed second grade and is not able to help me. I would like to be able to help my kids.” NB (12).

Other aspects that was raised were to protect the environment (one student), help other people (three students), to make children stop using and selling drugs (one student) respect or value others and make friends (four students), to improve my life (three), protect myself (one), talk well and express myself (two), get social security number and official ID-card (one) and be

able to take public transportation without getting lost (two). The answer I found most interesting though, was the details in one of the answers with regard to help others:

“Yes, to teach other people who do not have the possibility to study. I have a little school together with my friend up in the hills. We make small guides and teach them all we are taught.” ZP (10).

Limitations within the learning circles compared to a normal school

By asking the students about the limitations of the learning circles compared to a normal school, I wanted to give the students an equal opportunity to express what they consider was better before. All of the students in Comuna 4 said that there was nothing that they liked more in a normal school. In Comuna 6, 11 of the students answered clearly that there was nothing, and one even said “*If the were teaching sixth grade, I would gladly stay here another year*” (KP, 15). Three of those who answers that there were things that was better in the normal school they used to attend, focus on what they used to know before but feel that they have lost after they started in the learning circle (one refers to lack of English classes, one multiplication and a third both read, write and multiply). Another two answered more on the side with respect to achievements, but shared other views that I find useful to include. One mentioned “*Well, I did not take drugs in the normal school, here I do. I want to stop doing this shit*”, another one pointed out the fact that her nephew had been injured the day before and that the tutors’ response should have been taking him to the hospital rather than taking him only to a doctor

5.2.4 Participation and social networks

Participation in local committees, associations, groups or organizations

In order to get an answer to the research questions six and seven related to the students contribution in integrating the learning circles into the community and establish to what degree they participate, I started by mapping the students’ participation in social groups and networks.

To what degree and in what manner are young IDPs involved making the learning circles and integrated part of the community?

What kind of social networks and local institutions are the young IDPs involved in?

As parents and close family members are important for the students’ participation in learning circle and learning circle activities, I also included questions related to their level of participation.

All of the students in the learning circle participate in a committee forming part of the methodology of the circles. The composition and the names of the committees in the two neighbourhoods vary a bit, but mostly cover the same areas: Coexistence and conflict resolution, health and environmental protection, communications, representation, sports and recreation. The activities are built upon team work and can be considered an important tool to equip the students with skills that increases their personal capacities in terms of joint collaboration and working with the community – aspects important for empowerment and social capital formation. In addition to the committees, students are elected representatives in the student government, and in Comuna 4 both the president and the vice president were among my interviewees. Few of the students are active in other organized activities, and the

same goes for their brothers, sisters and families. Among those I interviewed, one in Comuna 4 said he is member of a Christian youth group, and one in Comuna 6 said that he used to be member of Red Cross, but that he was expelled due to a conflict between his father and some other people in the neighbourhood. Three of the students I interviewed had been gang members (two in Comuna 4 and one in Comuna 6), but were no longer active. One of the students in Comuna 4 told me that she was active in a gang in another community than the one she lived in. A large number of the students told that their parents participate in workshops and those who have brothers or sisters attending learning circles, have family members participating in thematic group activities just like they do.

When I asked if they thought that the time they invest in committees would mean something or serve them in the future, most said yes and seem to have a very clear connection between the purpose of their committee and the perceived benefits, for instance:

“In the beginning it was a bit boring, now I am used to it. It serves in my daily life. I can tell my mother that it is important to clean and get rid of garbage in order to take care of our health. It also serves in the sense that I can teach others to look after the environment”. SV, 12, Committee of Health and Environment

“I have always liked it, it’s good for stopping fights”, XJI, 12, Committee for Conflict Resolution

“It teaches me how to work in group. QBP, 15, Sports Committee,

“I have always liked meetings, they ask for your opinion”, NBZ, 11, Committee of Communication and Recreation

“I like it because we get to hand out letters. And because the girl that leads the group is very good. I think it will serve me later on, I learn how to value other people and work together and share”, ST, 10, Committee of Health and Coexistence

“To take out the trash. I like it. I like to work in a group. It can help in the future, MVB, 13, Committee of Health and Coexistence.

Many of the perceived benefits are for others than themselves, such as

“I like it, in our committee we help those who are falling behind. With guides we talk to the children on how to look after them selves on the Health Day for instance”, WJ 18, Committee of Health and Coexistence

“I like it a lot, we can communicate with those who not know, and tell them how”, NB, 13, Committee of Communication and Recreation

“There are children who cannot write note book style, so we help them. We also invent games that the children can play so they don’t get bored”, NBB 12 Committee of Communications and Recreation

“I like it. It might serve later on, for instance with my children, I can teach them manners and educate them better” UD, 10, Committee of Communication and Recreation.

None of the interviewees shows any direct dislike with respect to their participation in a committee, the closest is “a bit boring to start with” or “at first at did not like it”. The tasks referred to when the students appeared less enthusiastic were cleaning and making it tidy.

Family members participating in organizations, groups, projects or committees

15 of the students (twelve in Comuna 6 and three in Comuna 4) told me that they had brothers and sisters attending the learning circle. A total of ten students stated that their parents have participated in one or more workshops. As for activities realized outside the learning activities, one in Comuna 4 told me that his parents are community leaders (participating in the junta directiva, neighbourhood leading committee), while of one student in each of the communities told me that their mothers were active in church activities. As for perverse social capital groups among family members, two told me that close relatives have been in the guerrilla while one told me that his uncle is part of the social cleaning (death squad) in his community. Two students tell me that they brothers are gang members. These figures might be higher as the students have good reasons to protect their family members. In a few cases, other students told me for instance that the brothers of a specific girl were gang members, but when I interviewed her, she said that no family members (only friends) were gang members.

The role of participation

The word “participation” seemed to cause some confusion, particularly with respect to the question where my aim was to explore the importance of the student and family members’ participation in supporting and strengthening the implementation of the learning circle. The participation of the parents were mainly related to attending workshops, helping their children with their homework, or as in the case of Comuna 4, partake in the chicken and herb garden-project. As for the students themselves, their participation were mainly found within the structure of the learning circle, even though the work they carry out in the committees is extended towards their participation the community in different ways.

Perceived impact of community participation

Everybody except for one person believes that something can be achieved by citizen participation in their community. Many of the answers are more general and pointing out that participation might be the key to solve some of the problems the community is facing: “*Yes, to help out so that there are not so many problems*” and XJ, 12, “*Yes, to solve problems, to do it with dialogue*”, ST 10 and “*Yes, because people get help, and they help each other mutually*”, NB, 13. Others give direct examples of situations that they have witnessed or been a part of:

“Yes. There was a lady that lost her home in a fire, then we arranged a lottery to collect money for her so she could get a new place to stay”, NBB 12.

“Yes, for instance on the Day of the Child, the community sold used clothes so that they could afford giving children sweets”, NBZ, 11

More examples are: “*The activities that the Church carries out are good for the community*”, HM, 9 and “*Like the little school we have started for the children that do not have the opportunity to go to a normal school or a learning circle*”, ZP, 10, “*For instance that there might not be as much rubbish and garbage in the streets*”, SV, 12 and “*Here, community leaders have started an eatery for us attending the learning circles, where the food is very tasty. In the other school there was nothing*”, OF, 12.

The oldest interviewee also paints a broader picture describing both the importance of efforts and participation for the common good:

“Yes, I think so. If we all help out with the garbage, send our children clean to school, if we do not gossip that much and try to help out so that they children are not hungry our participation is good for the community. It is not always easy. My mother invited other people in the community so that she could teach them how to sew clothes on the machine. They did not show much interest, some didn’t even bother go get out of their beds. The same happened when the free, national teaching institution SENA [Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje – National learning centre] arranged a bakery course. They taught us to make croissant, churros and bread, but as only I and another lady showed up, the course was suspended”, WJ (18).

PART 2: The impact of learning circles on community level

The potential of the learning circles to reach out and have an impact on the surrounding communities is seen as vital for the operators of the learning circles. Collaborating with existing social capital networks (e. g community leaders, local grass root organizations) and contributing to the formation of new ones through participation in committees and focus on values such as collaborating and non-violent conflict resolution, are key elements. But to what extent are the learning circles able extend their activities beyond the learning circle and have an effect on the communities? Are the students becoming ‘change agents’ for their communities? How do the students perceive the environment in the communities where they live? How are these environments perceived to be affected by the learning circles, particularly with respect to the existence and formation of social capital? Do the students see a relationship between the challenges they are faced with, and the (potential) role and impact of the learning circles? These were some of the many questions emerging from research question six and seven (re-stated in paragraph 5.4.1) as well as the two sub-objectives for this study:

- To investigate how forces within social capital affect the impact of the learning circles
- To identify if young IDPs are empowered by the learning circles and look into which role use and construction of social capital plays in this process

The questions raised are important for identifying the perceived collective empowerment impact and the learning circle’s ability to create chance and enhance development since they also have the potential to reflect changes in attitudes and behaviour. The students were given questions such as who they would turn to for help (to see what parts of their social networks that were considered important, and to see if the learning circles or friends from those were mentioned), how they and their family members solve conflicts (to see the effect on the emphasis on dialogue, collaboration and non-violent conflict resolution, and if there was a difference in the approach of the student and his or her family members) and presence of positive and perverse social capital groups (to get an idea of the social capital at work outside the learning circle environment). The students were also asked what they considered the biggest problem in their communities, and how it could be solved (to see if participation and collective action is seen as important in the solution). I also asked them to identify the most positive thing about their community, and how this could be strengthened (again my objective was to see if they considered participation and collective action important).

The concept of ‘community’ is as presented in the theoretical framework primarily looked at with respect to ‘place’, meaning the physical location as a neighbourhood, and ‘face’ which includes the resident’s perception of social groups and networks (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan and Aber, 1997:191). As the learning circles provide education for children from more than one neighbourhood, the term ‘community’ is not limited to the specific neighbourhood were the learning circle is situated, even though it is natural to assume that the relationship of the

operators and staff to that specific neighbourhood (including the parents and its community leaders) is closer than that to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Considering that the students that I have interviewed come from a several different neighbourhoods, their perceptions are not only different due to personal experiences, but also because they live in different, physical neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood has its own characteristics and will have affected the students' answers to my questions about use and construction of social capital. Regardless of these distinctions, the communities where the students live also have several and often interrelated features in common. High levels of displaced families, unemployment, crime and violence are among these.

5.3 The relationship between learning circles and community well-being

The majority of the students viewed the learning circle as important to the well-being of their community. Only two of the interviewed answered "no" to this question, one of them was the previously mentioned boy that had been involved in drugs and a gang because of a fellow class mate that he got to know in the learning circle. The other student expressed her dislike with regard to methodology. The positive answers are mainly related to improved access for IDPs and out of school children (13 in total), examples of answers are "Because they are helping children. There is a lot of children that don't learn how to read and write until they are 15 years old", MB 9, "*The learning circle provides something that you we do not have*", OF, 12 and "*Earlier children like me did not get opportunity to go to school, now these children can study*", SV, 12.

Some also point out the negative consequences of not being in school, such as abuse and hanging around in the streets (four in total):

"Without access to school, they [children] might get involved in bad things, start abusing alcohol for instance, KE, 13"

"Because they help a lot of children that are not studying. They do not have any other opportunities, and [if they do not go to school] they might get into trouble," QBP, 15

"Because many children get into trouble like drugs, many children are destroyed with that, KI 15.

Some of the students also link the improved access with an improved offer (methodology and curricula), such as NB 13:

"There are many children that would stay outside the school system if it where not for the learning circles. And here they learn a lot more than they do in a regular school".

Also others highlight that they learn more, in addition, two more says yes because "they listen more". Worth noting is also a girls' perspective on community perception:

"Yes I think so. But up there [in Comuna 6 Alta] there are children that go to the other school. They think that we are not learning anything, that we are wasting our time. It started with some rumours, with a lady that did not like the learning circle, and then she passed on the word", NBB 12

5.3.1 Use and construction of social capital outside the circles

Trust and reciprocity

Two important elements in social capital building are trust and reciprocity (Putnam 2000, 2002), and teaching students methods of helping each other, working together, participating and refrain from using violence, can be seen as important tools for achieving this. But are the students able to see the connection and apply what they learn, or are other relationships and ways of doing things considered more likely? Is it a difference in what they need help with? Ideally, I would have liked to direct all these questions to the child or young person alone, but as most probably would respond “my family”, the questions were phrased as “you and your family”.

Who would you and your family turn to for help?

Ten of the interviewees would consult family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles in addition to their parents; this amount was equally distributed between the two communities giving us a slightly higher share of the Comuna 4 students than those of Comuna 6 relying on family members as the number of interviewees is lower in Comuna 4. Five would consult public authorities, institutions or organizations like the police or child and welfare institutions like Bienestar Familiar and Families in Action. Of these only one of the students were from Comuna 4, the rest was from Comuna 6. Seven (three in Comuna 4 and four in Comuna 6) would consult teachers or someone at the learning circles (psychologist, director) while three would consult their neighbours. Three opted for friends or friends of family members, while three also mentioned “others in the community”. Another one said “where I am likely to get the best answer” while two said they had no one to turn to at all when given this open question.

As I wanted to see if there was any difference in whom or what institutions the students believed they would turn to, I asked questions where I was more specific in what kind of help I was thinking of. First I included one area where IDPs are facing particular challenges, and where a sense of empowerment through increased knowledge and self-esteem (taught in the learning circles) could place a role: When visiting public offices and registers. In addition, I included the issue of who they could ask for help if they have no money for food, medication and clothing. As explained earlier in this thesis, IDPs face many challenges in covering their basic needs: They have left land and livelihood behind, public assistance is limited jobs are few. My intentions with these questions were to redress whether the idea of going to a public office requires help from anyone special, and who that person or institution (e. g the learning circles) would be. Most of the interviewees responded a person, and in several of the cases, the answer was a different person than the one stated initially. In Comuna 4, everyone except from two mentioned a different person, and here the tutors and learning circles were not mentioned even once. Some simply swapped who among their close or extended family members when indicating who they would turn to, while two of the students relied in the support that they would be given in that very office. In Comuna 6, there were fewer differences in the answers and those who changed turned from “*someone who would know or would provide the best answer*” to become more specific; for instance “neighbours” WJ, 18 and “friends” ZJ, or from “la fiscalía” (a public office) to someone in the family, indicating that while in Comuna 4 two of the students were expecting to receive the support in the office also by asking specifically, the one student that specifically indentified the government authority as the agency that they would ask for help, would rather rely on the help of family members than to trust the people working there. This can indicate that the level of trust among the

students is lower in Comuna 6. As for help to by food, medication or clothing, four in Comuna 4 would turn to their family members, while seven in Comuna 6 would do so. The number of interviewees that would ask neighbours is quite even; three in Comuna 6 and two in Comuna 4. In Comuna 6, five would turn to organizations and public welfare institutions while none in Comuna 4 mentioned this option.

Most have someone they think they could turn to, but not everyone. SV (12) for instance makes it clear in her answer how they can only turn to themselves:

“We don’t have anyone we can ask. Our other family members do not help us. Some of my cousins treat us really bad”, in answering who could help them if they needed money for food, medication or clothing, she underpins how they do not have anyone to turn to by saying: We would either have to beg or recycle. We had to do that. Sometimes we have to stay hungry too”.

Conflict resolution

When asking the students questions related to how they approach a conflict or a fight, I chose to distinguish between fights and conflicts with family and friends, and fights with neighbours or other community members. That way I wanted to get an idea of 1) their general attitudes towards conflict resolution 2) if there is a difference in how they solve them (thin/thick social capital).

Conflicts and fights within the family

Both in Comuna 4 and Comuna 6, the majority of the interviewees believe in solving problems talking, and also present this ideal as the way they and their family members approach a conflict. Two of the exceptions (both in Comuna 4) are just examples of alternative ways of constructive or non-violent conflict resolution; one said that he would use the friendship mail, another said the committee for conflict resolution, as both imply dialogue, these are added to the group that states that conflicts are solved talking. The total figure for “talking” in Comuna 4 is then 11, whereas the total figure for Comuna 6 is 14. One of these (EJB, 14) said:

“In my house there is no fighting. If I have any trouble, I talk. If I need help I ask my father”,

In addition to these 14 that opted for dialogue, one stated “to separate them” while another said that a confrontational approach was more likely: “Ha! Fight more” (KF, 13).

On my question to whether their solution worked, several of the answers were completely positive. Others were partly positive such as “most of the time”, “sometimes” or “not always, but that is the way to do it”. As in the case of SV (12), who was among those who said conflicts are solved talking, it is important to see these as ‘truths’ with modifications:

“Sometimes we solve it talking. Sometimes, when my grandmother was hitting me, my grandfather would start fighting with her. Sometimes it was solved talking; sometimes they just had to wait until the anger passed. I have fought with a friend too. I tried to talk, but she did not care, so then I just left it like that”.

If they are unable to solve it themselves either as family members or friends, they might look for help and this will obviously be affected by context. If at school, they will ask the tutors or other friends, like NBB (12): “There is a psychologist that can help us, the one that is part of

the learning circles". If they have a conflict with friends outside the learning circle, many will ask their parents for help if they chose to involve anyone, like NB (13):

"If it does not work, one could look for another friend or family member that can help reflect on how the problem can be solved."

As for those talking about conflicts within the family, they seem more reluctant to involve others, the majority said they would solve it within the family without asking others. And when involving others, the students refer to acts of violence, like HM 9: "We would call the police, once my brother was drunk and hit my sister and pushed my mother".

Conflicts and fights with neighbours and more distant community members

Several continue to highlight the importance of talking (four in Comuna 4 and seven in Comuna 6), but in both communities, there are fewer that consider dialogue and peaceful talking as a likely solution. And even though they refer to dialogue as preferred option, they highlight the gap between intentions and how it is actually solved, for instance:

"Always talking first, but then there is fighting, and that does not help" MAY (11) and "It is solved, but not completely. We have some difficult neighbours, there is a woman that is very rude and says a lot of mean things", WJ (18).

In total, only a few believed that dialogue really solves the conflict. As in the previous question, one of the students in Comuna 4 refers to the committee of conflict solution as where to go, indicating together with two others in Comuna 4 and two in Comuna 6 that they might ask friends or neighbours for help. Some also said they would ask their parents for help, if they were the ones that had a conflict. The number of students in Comuna 6 that wishes to involve the police is three (and thus higher than for the previous question) when the conflict involves neighbours and other community members. Two of the students in Comuna 6 answered more conflict, one of them with a quite drastic view on how the situation would evolve:

"Let's say that a neighbour hits my mother, then I would go and find a knife", KF (13).

The other simply said: "Fighting. It is not possible to solve it", NBB (12)".

Three of the students in Comuna 6 found it hard to imagine what would happen and rather stated that they had not experienced any conflicts with neighbours or other community members. One of the displaced students referred to a very strict attitude towards fighting in his place of origin, and this view seemed to prevail as a model for how he looked upon this kind of conflict:

"Where I lived before (we had to flee) they gave a fine to those who fought. They had to either pay a high fine of 500,000 pesos or help doing community work on the roads. Because of this there was no fighting. And we have not been fighting with anyone here ", EJB (14).

Others, like SV (12) in Comuna 4 considered avoiding or ignoring the conflict as the best way of approaching the conflict: "We just leave it like that until the anger is gone," SV (12).

Perceived presence of groups, networks and organizations

Two of the students in Comuna 4 say they do not know anything about any positive or negative organizations or groups in their community. After the initial interviews, I started asking those

who do not mention anything, more direct questions, for instance about projects they knew about, women's and youth groups and Church activities to see if those associations help. This might have affected some of the answers, but I considered it important to get more than "I don't know". I also asked them more specifically about what is referred to as perverse social capital (Moser and McILwaine, (2000); gangs, paramilitaries and guerrilla. Two students in each of the two communities claim that there are no gangs, and one in each say there are no guerrillas. Whereas the presence of paramilitaries and guerrilla (and how the children sometimes tend to mix them) might be harder to distinguish now after the formal demobilization of the paramilitaries and the weakening position of the FARC guerrilla, the presence of gangs seems according to all adults (tutors, parents, coordinators) and most other children and youth I talked to, obvious. This is also backed by several assessments done in the area (OCHA, 2006; Garzón, 2005)

In Comuna 4, the positively perceived organizations that were mentioned were a health organization, a local group collecting garbage, the group of local leaders (junta directiva), a soccer team, the learning circle (which for the majority seems to not be considered an organization), and *Los Paracos*, a death squad-like social cleansing group that gets rid of "unwanted elements" such as drug dealers, drug abusers, thieves and people who are too radical and loud about their political opinions and expressed concerns (Garzón, 2005). Their existence and the fact that they are considered as positive by not only some students, but also one of the mothers I interviewed, can partly explain two of the findings related to the question. First of all, some students fear speaking about the presence of gangs, guerrillas and paramilitaries. Second, these communities have often suffered from lack of institutional presence and rule of law. Like one of the girls that in one of the next questions tell about a murderer that is let out of custody after two weeks with his case closed. Secret neighbourhood groups taking care of the problem might seem for some as the only way to solve some of the many problems that the communities have with crime and violence. Positive organizations in Comuna 6 are Church committees (four), international organizations like UNICEF and Red Cross (five), and police, recyclers and sports groups (one each). Two of the interviewees said that there were no positive organizations in the community at all.

As for negative organizations in Comuna 4, four of the students mentioned gangs, two said guerrilla, one the death squad (los Paracos) and one the paramilitaries. One also mentioned the marihuana-smokers, which to some of the students I interviewed where the same as gang members. In Comuna 6, the number of students highlighting gangs is high (thirteen) and many of the elaborate:

"There are lots of them. Once one of the gang members took out a knife and threatened me. He that hit me yesterday says that he is member of a gang. In Caldas the guerrilla was about to take my sister. Now she lives in Bucaramanga," EB (13)

"The only thing they do is to hurt and destroy, it is frightening. My elder brothers (12, 14, 16 years old) are gang members. They treat us really bad, once, when my mother went a way for a while, they would not give us food. We had to ask the lady up front. My mother knows about it", NBZ (11)

"There are a lot of gangs here. They kill the people that stay out after 10 PM. I hear shooting, which is scary. Sometimes I get into my brother's or father's bed and hide there ", ZP (10).

The death squad (Paracos) is also mentioned by three of the interviewees in Comuna 6. An ex-gang member (13) tells me:

"My uncle is with them. There was a guy that took something that did not belong to him from a brother of one of them. Then they killed him. They bring their chain saw and they hurt or kill you. If you have been threatened, you need to leave this place. Here there are barely any marihuana-smokers anymore. They kill them. They kill young people, 13 or 14 year olds. If they catch me smoking, they will kill me too".

The guerrilla is mentioned by one in Comuna 6, while two in Comuna 6 mentioned paramilitaries as negative organizations.

PERCEIVED PRESENCE OF SOCIAL GROUPS AND NETWORKS

POSITIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL GROUPS/ORGANIZATIONS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN TOTAL
Local government, <i>junta directiva</i>	4
Church groups	4
National and international NGOs	5
Sports group	2
Learning circle	1
Recycle project	1
Police	1
PERVERSE SOCIAL CAPITAL GROUPS/ORG.	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN TOTAL
Gangs	17
Guerrilla	3
Paramilitary groups	3
Death squads	4

Non-organized individual efforts and activities affecting the community

If this question was considered too complicated, I tried by asking for important personalities, people everybody knows that does something particularly good or bad. I specifically said that I was not looking for names, more a description of the person(s) and what they do.

Four of the students in Comuna 4 could not come up with any individual that contributed in a positive or negative way in their community. In Comuna 6 the amount of students that expressed the same was eight. Among those who could think of individuals that affected the community, many answered persons that are likely to be connected to a group, project or even an organization. Despite the fact that several of the students mentioned local, national and international organizations and institutions with specific names when I asked them the previous question, I got the impression that the actors behind different initiatives are unclear to many, and that they for this reason also for in answering this question list up activities carried out by individuals that appear to be part of organized activities, such as “There are some good people that try to improve the bad things in the community. For instance fixing the road or help people who do not have a place to stay” NB (13) and “Those you work in order to ensure that we have water. They established a committee that will work to find a solution on the water shortage”, CT (12). In addition are community leaders mentioned by two in Comuna 4 and two in Comuna 6, indicating that they might be considered individual representatives more than a group of organized people to some of the interviewees. Other answers are more related to positive, individual efforts included “There is a lady that lives around here. She helps the children, FM (11)”, “When a man died recently, the people contributed with money so that they could bury him”, SV (12), “There is a man that lives up there that recycles copper and aluminium. He collaborates with many in the community, EJB

(14) and “There are people that give us food”, NBB, 12. As for individuals contributing in a negative way, persons connected to gangs and death squads are mentioned by several, and it might be difficult to distinguish their role as individual from their perceived role as member of a group. One of the students answered for instance

“There is a man, he is like a death squad or guerrilla member, and is very aggressive. He killed a man that was walking on the street with a child. Even though they arrested him, he was free two weeks later, and then he came back here” NBB (12).

Other persons referred to as negative contributors than murderer (mentioned by two others as well), are thieves, crack dealers and drug abusers. One of the students told me how this affects her schooling:

“There are two men up there [Altos de Comuna 6] that appear suspicious, they were there between nine and eleven in the morning, I could not go to the learning circles in case they would steal things from our house”, UD (9).

Another tells how they risk being mugged on their way back home:

“When you go up there [Comuna 6 Alta], there are persons that steal your groceries”, ZP (10).

Perceived community problems

In Comuna 4, six of the students identify fighting and violence as the biggest problem in their community, in Comuna 6 the number of students saying the same is five, meaning that the amount is somewhat lower when comparing the total number of interviewees in the two communities. Other problems identified which in many cases are related to violence and conflict are gangs (three in total), drugs (three in total), robbery (two) and rape (one). One problem fuels another, as a fifteen year old interviewee in Comuna 4 put it: “The fighting, the drugs, and the fact that they [los Paracos] are persecuting those who do drugs”. Other problems identified are lack of water (one in Comuna 4, four in Comuna 6), large amounts of mud and poor sewage drainage. Only one points out lack of money as the main problem. One said there are no problems at all, while two said they did not know. Another problem identified by the students that is also relevant to relate to this distance, can be labelled the perceived lack of cohesion among the community members. NBB (12) in Comuna 6 said “That people are not helping each other and that they are fighting. Community leaders are talking about that we need to be more unified, that we need to stick together, maybe that is the solution”, and an 11 year old girl who has three brothers, who are gang members, also gives a related example: “When they hand out groceries for free, they never give us anything. They give everyone in the neighbourhood food, except us. The other people don’t like us, NBZ. The robbing and mugging can also be seen as a result of little solidarity even though poverty and lack of opportunities are probably main triggers. Like in WJ’s (18) example:

“Even though they see that people have virtually nothing, they rob them. A little while ago a man was brutally mugged on his way home. They stabbed him 15 times and took his whole worth of two weeks job. He barely survived”.

Perceived positive aspects on community level

When asked this final question, six students (three in each community) said they did not know what they would consider as the most positive aspect by living in their community, while seven (one in Comuna 4 and six in Comuna 6) said that there are no positive things to mention at all. Their perception contrast the other, more positive group (four from each

community) that despite the difficulties and hardships they experience, highlight moments of collaboration and help from others. Some are more general in their answer, like:

“It is positive when people do not fight and collaborate in stead” MN (13), “That there are people that do help out in the community QBP” (15), “There are people that are nice to you, that understand you and show solidarity”, JE (13) and “If they see that it is really serious, they will help you”, LA (9).

Others are more specific giving examples, like “That we work together to find a solution to the water problem and that we help people that have nothing to eat”, BR (12), “That there are meetings to arrange cleaning of the community”, XJ, (12) and “When for instance there is a child that is getting lost and do not have anything to eat, the people help him and look for him. That happened to my brother”, RU (12). What all these answers reflect, is that there are *some* people that collaborate and show solidarity, not all. This notion can be seen as further strengthened by another answer by ZP (10): *“Some people get together in order to get things done, but others don’t”*. This issue was also raised by one of the field coordinators when I asked about the impact of the learning circles on community level. One of the topics we talked about was the parents’ participation in workshops and commitment to the environment surrounding the learning circles:

“You need to take into consideration the constant mobility of many of the people living here. The parents that plan to stay, more often participate in workshops and projects that give them additional skills and knowledge. With some of them, we do see an impact. Some of them are later becoming involved in development projects and activities with other actors in the community. But many of them are just passing through, and do not have the same incentives of participating”.

When I asked how they believed the positive aspects could be strengthened, most of those who mentioned positive aspects answered that they did not know. A few pointed out “work together”, who are those who points out unity and collaboration in their examples of positive things happening in their communities.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have presented and summarized my findings from Soacha. They have been divided into five categories (access, perceived impact, hopes and aspirations for the future, participation and presence of social networks). The findings demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with the learning circles. Access to education is remarkable improved, so is the students’ perceptions of going to school. The learning environment is seen as very positive, and they are learning new skills that contribute to social capital formation. Many report that they have achieved more than they did in a normal school. Their hopes and aspirations for the future are high, almost everybody believes that they will complete secondary education and find a job. Their positive experiences and overall perception of the learning circles do however not remove the fact that most live in poverty and in communities heavily affected by the internal conflict, domestic as well as street violence. If we look further than the learning circle committee participation, perverse social capital groups are perceived as a far more present than groups that contribute to positive social capital on community level, benefitting the majority. Violence and the presence of gangs are considered the highest problems in the communities. The positively perceived aspects of their communities are few and mainly related to unity and collaboration between people in the community.

6 Key findings, analysis and discussion

“When the students start in the learning circle, they want to be thieves and gang members, when they leave, they want to become teachers, improve their lives and by a house to their mother. (Tutor)”



PHOTO: Linda Pérez. Bukásen

In this chapter I will show the implications of the findings for existence and formation of social capital and empowerment. I will analyze and discuss what changes that take place, on what different levels and by which actors. The key findings presented in chapter five will be discussed and analyzed with respect to the theoretical framework presented in chapter three. I have identified four key findings based upon research questions and findings in chapter five: Improved access to education, changes in attitudes, behaviour and achievements, the challenge of social capital formation on community level and the issue of vulnerability and sustainability for the learning circles.

6.1 Improved access to education

One important finding highlighted in the previous chapter is the impact of learning circles for the students' access to education. Without the learning circles, many of these students would be outside the primary education system, mostly because of lack of money for uniform and materials or because no available placements. The implications of this finding for empowerment and social capital formation can be seen from several different angles. I will analyze and discuss these aspects from two different perspectives: What have access done for empowering young IDPs in Soacha, and what is the relationship between access, empowerment, and social capital formation.

6.1.1 Access and empowerment potential

The first direct result from attending a learning circle is that the student is guaranteed access to a mother school later in the education process, meaning that their right to primary education is formally fulfilled. Ideally, both learning circle operators target all out of school

children in the neighbourhood using a wide number of techniques to make sure that everyone is given the offer to attend (Ayala, 2008; Rivera, 2008). Reaching absolutely everyone and being able to absorb all potential students at all times, especially since there is a constant arrival of newly displaced families, is probably difficult. I did however not find any indications of the existence of children known to the community and the learning circles who had not been presented with the option to make the choice of attending. But I was given information indicating that limitations to the total number of placements might jeopardize the objective of ensuring placement in *nearest* mother school. Whether this would be the case or not depended on the readiness of the students (if more students than anticipated would be ready to be transferred for instance) and the overall planning and cooperation between the operators and the educational authorities in Soacha. Employees at one of the operators' head offices told me that it earlier was possible to register the names of the students attending online in the government system in order to make sure that the educational planning authorities would have as exact data as possible. This was considered important as they knew that not all parents would know how or have the opportunity to do so on behalf of their children. After a change in the public authority database system, this was no longer possible. Now the operator feared that the process of registering the children would take longer, putting the promised access to education at a nearby mother school at risk.

6.1.2 Agency and opportunity structure

The potential effect of improved access to education for empowerment can be analyzed by looking into the aspects of the students' agency and opportunity structure as introduced in chapter three (Alsop, 2004). With the existence of the learning circles, the ability of the students to make meaningful choice – their agency – increases. Whether this ability is transformed into action, depends on their opportunity structure. This structure is affected by formal and informal institutions which include laws, regulatory frameworks and norms governing people's behaviour. On an overall level, Colombian children's constitutional right to primary education and Law 387 addressing the rights of IDPs can be seen as the regulatory framework together with the governments' commitment to meet the Millennium Development goals on education. Another important part of the opportunity structure affecting the students in the two communities is the formal agreement between the educational authorities and the operators of the learning circles that guarantees access to education for all enrolled students also after they are transferred to a mother school. The institutional presence that ensures that this right is fulfilled is the learning circles backed by the local alliances and support from the government and national and international NGOs. The local leaders and existence of grass root organizations and nutrition projects such as the *comedores* serving lunch also form part of the opportunity structure enabling the students to seize the opportunity to complete their primary education. Parents and students participating in workshops and committees also form part of the institutional framework and demonstrate the close relationship between social capital formation and the framework that affects degree of empowerment among the students. Norms such as behaviour, attitude and values common for the community members is also considered to be a part of the opportunity structure, adding yet another component closely tied to the concept of social capital. Norms affecting the children's opportunities to enrol the learning circles will also be discussed with respect to direct empowerment measures below, whereas the students' changes in attitudes and behaviour and its importance for social capital formation will be discussed with respect key finding two – impact. More direct ways of measuring empowerment by analyzing access can be seen with respect to the *option to make a choice, if the option to chose is used* and the *results achieved* from the choices made. For key

finding one, I will primarily look at the first two, while the results achieved will be analyzed and discussed under whenever relevant for the impact of the learning circles.

6.1.3 Option to make a choice

There are other barriers that reduce children's options to make a choice than those emerging from the institutional and regulatory frameworks. Several of the children who have yet to complete their primary education have responsibility for younger brothers and sisters. Some also have their own children to take care of. In Comuna 6, the tutors and pedagogical advisor told me the students are allowed to bring their younger 'dependants' to the learning circle, widening the offer for those who normally would fall behind in a traditional school setting. For this group, at least for Comuna 6 where I have explicitly been told that this is possible, another obstacle transforming agency into effective action has been removed. Another barrier for access is related to working children and the aspect of financial assets. Even though the learning circles are for free, do not require uniform and includes warm lunch, there is a cost attached to the learning circles for many parents. Some children have so many other responsibilities at home, which not even the fact that they can bring their younger brothers and sisters to school can help reduce. Other students work outside the home, e. g as street vendors or in eateries. As one of the students in Comuna 4 expressed, she sometimes have to go begging in stead of attending the learning circles because there is no money for food (SV, 12). Several of the children I interviewed work in addition to attending the learning circles. Some had been working full time before they entered the circles and now worked part time. As the learning circles are an offer also to those who are partly absent due to work responsibilities both at home and outside, yet another obstacle is, if not always in practical terms, formally removed. One of the students told me that he was grateful for the opportunity to continue his studies after many years of working, but expressed that finding the balance between the two was sometimes hard (WJ, 18).

The distance between where the children live and where the learning circle is offered, is another potential barrier. Even though the aim is that the learning circles are situated close to where the children live in much higher degree than what is normal in normal schools, the population pressure in sector four and six in Soacha results in larger distances than what is desired for some of the students. Two of the girls told me that they had to pass through dark areas for long distances and another girl, who lived in one of the last houses up on the hill in Altos de Comuna 6, told me that it took her almost two hours to get home. Several of the children live as mentioned in other communities than the community that they were taught in. Reasons given were that there was no learning circle nearby or that there were no placement at the nearest one at the moment. Despite of this, few students really complained, and I was not given any specific examples of children who were not allowed by their parents to attend the learning circles because of a distance/security aspect. Nevertheless, given the high rates of violence, it is reasonable to believe that some are denied the option to attend as a result of where they live compared to where the learning circles are offered.

In total, access to education or the option to make a choice (going to school) appears to have been considerably improved due to the existence of learning circles. The majority of the students said they would stay at home or do nothing if they had not been given the chance to attend a learning circle. And as for those who said that they would look for placements elsewhere, their chances for getting one (at least nearby) are small in many areas of Soacha. According to Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo (CID) (Rivera, 2008), 1200 students were

currently without placements in the normal schools in Soacha, a number that would have been much higher without the provision of learning circles.

6.1.4 If the option to choose is used

Whether the option to choose is used, is closely related to the several barriers just presented. But there are also other factors affecting whether the choice is made. Being encouraged and supported by their parents is an issue that most of the tutors and also the pedagogical advisor (Comuna 6) and field coordinators (both communities) highlighted as crucial for a child's educational opportunities. According to them, this applies to when the students start attending the learning circles as well as throughout their learning process. That is one of the reasons why parents are included in the learning trough involving them in home work (e. g inviting the parents to contribute with texts and stories in the 'travelling notebook') and inviting them to participate in workshops. To what extent a student receives the support from parents and other family members can be considered as a part of their psychological assets forming part of their "agency". Even though the parents of the students interviewed have already given their support for their children to enter the learning circle, both tutors' and fields staff report that parents do not participate to extent needed for the learning circles to reach out a way that strengthens the link between the parents and the learning circles, thus contributing to a lower level of social capital formation among parents.

Related issues that can prevent attendance are as Dupuy (2008) argues related to sense of *relevance* in what they study, lack of *hope* for the future and competing alternatives relevant, psychological assets. According to field staff and tutors, so are prior experiences. If the students feel that what they study is relevant for their lives and what they would like to do (or given to opportunity to do) in the future, the long term impact is higher. Even though the learning circles are only taught on primary level, I find the focus on relevance for the lives and challenges (Ayala, 2008) the IDPs and deprived children are faced with as crucial in this context. What they learn and how they are taught is meant to have a psycho-social effect through offering a friendly teaching environment promoting friendship, collaboration and activities to improve self-confidence and determination, important in creating social networks and building skills for empowerment. That normal, public schools in Soacha to a little degree are able to offer the same, might explain why so many students express that they are happy with the learning circles, and add to its advantage that it is experienced as relevant for their life situation. But the difference in curricula, methodology and pedagogy might also have the opposite effect. As expressed in the empirical findings chapter, some parents and a few of the students are sceptical to the teaching approach as it is different from what they are used to. One of the girls even referred to a lady gossiping about the bad aspects of the learning circles perhaps affecting how other parents that did not have their children in learning circles themselves looked at the educational offer. Such perceptions among parents might have contributed to some parents choosing not to make use of the option, and reduced how they perceive the learning circles as relevant.

Also hope can be closely linked to whether the option is used or not (Dupuy, 2008). The tutors and field coordinators that have been working closely with the 'recruitment' of students report lack of hope as one of the reasons why some refused to accept the offer. In addition to express that it felt useless and that they will not gain employment anyhow, many of them also expressed lack of motivation because of their prior school experiences (Ayala; tutors; field coordinators; 2008). Considering the high level of scolding and authoritarian teaching methods applied in many of the schools the interviewees had been attending before, it seems

reasonable to believe that the experience of other children in the two neighbourhoods is similar, and that this can be among their reasons for not choosing to attend.

Another aspect that might affect if a child chooses to use the option is the existence of *competing alternatives*, and how these are considered compared to education. One of these competing alternatives might, as I already indicated when discussing the barriers that impedes the option to make a choice, be paid work. Other alternatives are, as Dupuy (2008) also found when conducting field work in the conflict-affected countries Nepal, Guatemala and Liberia, to join illegal armed forces or as perhaps even more likely in Soacha, being recruited to a gang. Just as the learning circles might protect children from joining gangs (or make them quit as two of my interviewees told me), gang membership might be the reason for why they do not choose to enter a learning circle when given the chance. Dupuy refers to this using the term 'opportunity cost' which will be further explored under the impact section where I discuss my findings related to the students' attitudes towards the future.

6.2 Changes in attitudes, behaviour and achievements

6.2.1 Attitudes towards education and learning circles

The students' perceptions of attending an educational institution appear to have been positively strengthened in the learning circles, even though there are also negative aspects raised by some. Several of the students reported that they used to dislike going to school or that they find the learning circles better than the normal school(s) that they attended before. The tutors and the way they approach the students are given as the most important reasons. This finding should however also be seen in light of the fact that few of them have other alternatives, and that lack of such might have contributed to a higher sense of satisfaction than what would have been the case if they have had other options. The students' prior experiences from a normal school or lack of experience from another school all together are also assumed to have affected their attitude towards the learning circles. When the students were asked about how they liked going to school before entering the learning circles, the distribution between "*I liked it*" and "*I did not like it*" was quite evenly distributed if we look at the overall distribution of the figures: Half said they did not like it, the other half said they did. If we look at the distribution on community level, there is a sharp distinction between the students as only two students in Comuna 4 liked going to school, while nine in Comuna 6 stated the same. Even though I should be careful suggesting possible reasons, one might be that since fewer of the interviewees in Comuna 4 are IDPs, many of them might have the same school before, and that this was of poor quality. Those who said they miss the regular school system appear to be either those who had an above average learning experience (like the girl that studied English), and those who have had a negative experiences with class mates like the boy that was introduced to drugs and gangs through a fellow student, or the girl that finds the other class mates rude and unfriendly.

The positive attitudes expressed towards the learning circles are not only related to access and the tutors. Also the methodology and focus on friendship and group work is appreciated by many. But there is also another aspect that affected the students' view points in a more negative way, and that is how new students arriving affect the learning environment and possibly also the formation of social capital within the learning circle. One girl in Comuna 6 mentioned the flow of new students coming throughout the school year as difficult:

“Often I get better along with those who started together with me since we have known each other since the beginning” (NB, 12 years old).

This aspect is interesting as the learning circles being open to include new students at any time is considered one of the important advantages of the learning circles’ contribution to improving access for IDPs and other out of school children. The girl was not the only one pointing out this possible downside to it, also the tutors mentioned it. Like in Comuna 6, where many started at the same time and have gotten used to each other and being adjusted to the methodology and study environment after months of being together. Newcomers seem to do something to the learning environment as many of them have been out of school for a while, and in addition might be traumatized by the conflict and violence.

6.2.2 Attitudes related to hope and aspirations for the future

As presented in the findings chapter, education is considered ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for the future by most of the students. Almost everyone believes that they will complete primary and secondary school, and almost everyone thinks they will find a job. Several even believe that persuading their dream career is within reach if they only work hard enough. This optimism might appear a bit surprising since most of the students come from displaced or very poor families where the parents have little education themselves. It is important to bear in mind that many of the interviewees are still very young, and what they dream and wish for, is not necessarily realistic. When I asked the tutors and the field coordinators, they said that even though they were sure that most (unless they moved) would complete primary, completing secondary school is a whole other challenge. One of them referred to a survey that was carried out stating that about 30 per cent of learning circle students fulfil secondary school. I have not been able to get hold of this survey, but given the circumstances for many of the students, the level of hope it is nevertheless high compared to what seems realistic. This is backed in the studies and assessments carried out by UN and the National Statistics Department in Colombia (OCHA, 2006; Garzón, 2005 and DANE, 2003), who identified lack of education on secondary level and job opportunities for young people in sector four and six in Soacha as some of the major problems for youth.

Hopes and aspirations have several implications for the potential of empowerment and social capital formation. The high levels of hope related to both education and future employment can have positive short terms effects regardless of the actual outcome. As Dupuy argues in her study *Education for Peace*, hope has a potential of increasing the cost for students to involve in the conflict. Hope for a better future (primarily involving getting paid work) was a crucial motivating factor for the students she interviewed. She also highlights the protective perspective referring to McMahon (1999) when stating ‘In the first place, education and employment can occupy children’s time and keep them under supervision, thus eradicating actual opportunities to engage in conflict’, even though she also recognizes that there is ‘a fine line here between education as a productive activity and education as a means of controlling young people’ (Dupuy, 2008:74). She uses as already mentioned the term ‘opportunity cost’ (2008:73-74) when she analyzes this aspect of education, and argues that the ‘opportunity cost of joining may be very low where there are few income-earning opportunities that are better than the income earned through rebellion’ and refers to the works of Collier (2000:94) who stated the following:

‘The willingness of young men to join a rebellion might be influenced by their other income-earning opportunities. If young men face only the option of poverty, they might be more inclined to join a rebellion than if they have better opportunities...’

In a long term perspective, these high amounts of hope might become problematic since the high unemployment rates that the young students in sector four and six in Soacha will be faced with when they leave school (OCHA, 2006, DANE, 2003) are likely to contribute to increased discontent. Such discontent and frustration might fuel violence and worsen the conflict and thus jeopardizing the benefits that the students have achieved through the non-violent and social capital building educational offer in the learning circles. As Dupuy argues:

‘...if educated individuals are not able to find betterpaying opportunities, such as formal employment (which may also largely dry up during the course of an armed conflict owing to insecurity), then the opportunity costs of joining a conflict may be lowered, and unemployment may become the basis of grievances that motivate people to join a rebellion’ (2008: 74).

And they might not only be tempted to join illegal armed groups. Also joining gangs/organized crime groups was considered the only option for youths without other options in a SIDA (Swedish International Development Corporation Agency) and World Bank study carried out in several marginalized neighbourhoods in Bogotá (Moser and McILwaine, 2000).

6.2.3 Changes in behaviour and achievements

Behaviour and achievements can in part be seen as a consequence of changes in attitudes even though there are other factors (such as agency and opportunity structure) that will affect the actual outcome. As I only interviewed a few parents, my main sources for detecting if students have changed their behaviour, are what the students have told through the interviews and what the tutors report. Several of the students reported that they have changed in how they interact with other students. Many of the students told me that they had learned to make friends and maintain friendships. Others expressed how they had learned how to work in groups and to respect others, for instance through another ways of solving conflicts. A large number of the students also expressed the change in relationship with the adult teaching them, a finding that has changed their attitudes towards the learning experience, possibly also affecting the change in relationship with other fellow students. The tutors, especially in Comuna 4 where most of the tutors have been working for four years, report on substantial changes among large groups of the students. But also in Comuna 6, with a much shorter time in operation, the tutors view changes in the students’ behaviour in the learning circles. As trust and reciprocity appear to be key elements when the tutors describe why they perceive such a level of behavioural change among many, the social capital formation within the learning circle environment seem crucial for changes in behaviour. Also the mothers I spoke to reported behaviour changes. Most were positive, such as one of the single mothers who had arrived Soacha a few months back with her family, and the past six months had had lot of fights with her 14 year old daughter. After two months in the learning circle, she saw a change in her daughter’s attitude towards family, tutors and friends as well as her achievements. Another mother, on the other hand, expressed that her daughter had become rude. When I asked for examples, her daughter interfered in matters and showed her mother less respect than before. One reason for this could be that the focus in the methodology on strengthening the student’s self esteem and participation, even though other reasons’ such as ‘teen age objections’ or new friends (like in the case of the boy who got recruited to a gang in the circles), can just as likely.

As for achievements, I chose to distinguish between cognitive and social skills when presenting my findings. Despite its difference in methodology between a learning circle and a normal school, the emphasis and appreciation of core subjects such as mathematics seem

important to the students and their parents. Many of the students said that they have strengthened their cognitive skills in core subjects. It is hard to say whether this is because of the good quality of the pedagogy and methodology, or if it is because the students and their parents automatically see progress within what might be considered as 'real' subject as very important. As for results, students from learning circles tend to be just as good as or better than class mates with respect to academic achievements after entering a mother school (Ayala, 2008), and this tendency can support the students' perceptions in this matter. Given that the quality of education is not always matching the standards, this is an aspect which can be important with respect to empowerment in class-divided society as the Colombian. Alternative pedagogies with high focus on academic achievements like e. g Montessori are taught in private schools out of reach for most poor and deprived people. But I also find it important to mention that mathematics; reading and writing are also of concern for some of the students. When I asked the question of what they considered difficult or challenge in the learning circles, more students focused on these subjects than other aspects of their learning experience, then again rising the issue of what is considered a students' main task in school (learn cognitive skills or social skills).

With respect to social skills, it appeared clear that many appreciated working in groups, committees and having a voice. But even though many perceived a difference in focus and teaching environment, it seemed that many were, perhaps due to their age, not equally aware of the value the social skills they learn for the life outside the learning circles. Of those that did see a relevance of what they learned in the learning circles for others aspects of their lives than educational/professional, most referred to situations of using cognitive skills in helping brothers and sister or own children with their homework. A few of the students identified other areas such as help protecting the environment and value others. It could be that social skills are not seen as something a part, that it is rather considered more of a technique making use of other skills by the students. Regardless of their perception, the tutors and field staff reported that the students enter the mother school with a different approach than those who have never experienced anything else. They might be faced with an initial chock getting back to more authoritarian class room with dictate, but many have been given stronger analytical skills through working in groups and committees and being taught that they have rights as children. The challenge is however how the mother schools are handling the difference among the students. As indicated earlier with Trojan horse example, the operators told that they are working with the mothers schools trying to influence the pedagogy, but so far it seems like the learning circles are alone in this approach, and probably thus reducing the overall empowerment potential of the learning circles. Even worse, for several of the students, having been invited into a 'world of opportunities' and then being sent back into the old system, might contribute to high levels of frustration. Such discontent has the potential of destroying the positive social capital formation or, as argued in Dupuy (2008); contributes to recruitment to perverse social capital groups such as gangs or illegal armed groups.

6.3 The challenge of social capital formation on community level

The learning circles seek to contribute to empowerment and social capital building through a number of different approaches. One is the strategy mentioned in chapter two with respect to the learning circles being a "two-way bridge" between the transitional education offer and the community (Ayala, 2008), involving parents, local leaders and organizations as well as national and international NGOs. Another approach is done through the methodological instruments, including the topics the students are working with oriented towards participation in the community. The home visits, workshops and home work involving the parents are

meant to strengthen their ties to the learning circles and the community. Despite these efforts, one of the challenges that appear to emerge from the findings is how to make the effect of empowerment and the positively perceived social capital formation from the learning circles reach out to the communities, both from the students' perspectives, but also in a broader sense.

For instance, when I asked the students about the biggest problem in their community and how it can be solved, and the most positive aspect and how it can be strengthened, the learning circles were not mentioned at all, despite that most of the students valued the circles, and some (7) would turn to them when they have problems. It appears that the learning circles' relevance as 'problem solvers' is limited to the sphere surrounding the learning circles. This finding might also contribute to explain why the learning circles is not seen as social organizations or institutions in the same way as others that have been mentioned by the students, nor that the efforts of the tutors are mentioned here: The learning circles could appear to be something of its own kind, perhaps better at creating *bonding* social capital than *bridging* social capital (Putnam, 2000:22). This might indicate that the operators and the staff working in the circles still have a way to go before they are regarded as integrated actors in the social fabric in the communities. One could also ask to what extent it is or could be the role of the learning circle to have that function. On the other hand, the tendency might just be a result of how the students label their surroundings, perhaps the wording or way of categorizing social networks and actors are not corresponding with they way they see and perceive them. Another aspect already mentioned that might be relevant in this context is the previously mentioned concept of 'community'. Even though many live near the learning circle, the learning circle might very well belong to another neighbourhood and are thus not regarded as "their" community when they are asked to mention the existence of social groups and networks.

Returning back to the broader sense of the issue, and trying to summarize some of the findings that affect social capital formation and the outreach of the learning circles on community level, there are particularly three areas that I would like to highlight: Norms, trust and reciprocity in communities in flux, degree of participation among the parents and perceived stock of perverse social capital.

6.3.1 Norms, trust and reciprocity and communities in flux

As Putnam argues in his many books and publications, norms, trust and reciprocity are important ingredients in the creation of social capital (Putnam, 2002, 2003). After conducting my field work in two communities with high levels of mobility among the inhabitants, these three ingredients appear to be constantly challenged. First of all because large parts of the population are passing through with hopes of returning home or going somewhere else. This instability affects the level of trust and reciprocity between community members and even though we see many examples of friendship and trust between students and between the students and the tutors (particularly in Comuna 4) the climate for extending the culture of mutual trust and reciprocity outside the learning circles still appear to be difficult. The mothers I talked to were very positive towards the learning circle, but quite reluctant to allowing their children to spend time with fellow class mates after school. They did not want them to visit other children at home, expressing distrust in both their children's class mates and their parents. One of the mothers expressed a high level of distrust towards the whole community, and felt that the distrust was mutual: "*You never know who is who and whom they are with*" (NF, Comuna 4). When I asked her if she would ask someone for help, she said

“I will look after myself; I know where to go and how to get it. There is a lot of selfishness and envy”. As one of the critics of Putnam’s initial works pointed out, traditional, inherited norms through generations are likely to change, and it is important to take into consideration that a new set of rules must developed in order to ensure survival. This is crucial in this context because of the ‘erosion of forms of civil participation that rely on norms connected to moral duty and faith that affects social capital’ (McLean, Schultz and Steger, 2002:10). Putting it in simpler terms, the rupture in family structures and alienation from original culture among the IDPs and conflict affected people in sector four and six in Soacha might affect the development of new norms. The continuous flux of people arriving and leaving these communities makes the development of new norms even more challenging.

6.3.2 Degree of participation among parents

The field coordinators and the tutors report that lack of commitment among parents is one of the ongoing challenges. Both operators give emphasis on work shops and contact with the parents. In Comuna 4, the field coordinator told me that the attendance had improved little by little. Visiting the parents, trying to involve them in activities such as creating and taking care of the herb garden and joining in the committee for following up the chicken during the holidays had throughout the years increased participation among parents. But it is not only a question of getting them in. When I was present at the first meeting of the parent group tasked with caring for the chicken, I got the opportunity to get an impression of the potential challenges: The mothers invited to join the group were all afraid of committing themselves since they already had much to do at home. In addition they were sceptical towards the other group members’ abilities of caring for the chicken, and they where afraid that the others in the group would not do their part. When I came back one week later, the group was already facing some of the anticipating challenges: Two of the chicken had died due to wrong care and one of the mothers had not turned up on her days. The others were furious, but received support from the field coordinator in how to approach the challenges. I do not know whether they continued participating in the groups, but the task of identifying areas of social capital formation among parents seemed to be an important one for the field coordinator in Comuna 4. In Comuna 6, the operator also gives priority in engaging the parents in their children’s schooling and has an own family coordinator. They make home visits and arrange work shops where the topics raised are responding to the parents’ and community’s needs and challenges expressed in initial workshops carried out with the parents. Examples of these are domestic violence and spare-time activities. But the operator is not involving the parents in project groups or in a parent government and this might have contributed to the difference perceived between the two communities, which will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. The tutors in Comuna 6 also tell me that fewer parents are assisting now than in the beginning despite that other staff members say the opposite. Both children and tutors tell me that the operators used to hand out groceries at the works shops to attract parents in the beginning, but that it is not done anymore. This might partly explain partly why fewer parents are attending, even though a weaker relationship between the parents and the learning circles in Comuna 6 probably contributes to lower attendance too.

6.3.3 Perceived stock of social capital on community level

As measuring level of social capital in a community is difficult, indicators such as the number and nature of social groups and networks are often used. Even though critics of Putnam’s work argue that ‘new’ ways of organizing (ad hoc), other channels that only face-to-face gatherings (internet) and the globalization of networking (McLean, Schultz and Steger, 2002)

must be taken into consideration, the character of the communities (high level of poverty, low density of important ICT tools such as Internet access, limited travelling outside Colombia and contact with the global community) made the traditional approach more feasible for this study. In addition I included, as presented in the previous chapter, questions related to who they would turn when they needed help and how they solved conflicts and problems in order to identify other, more informal aspects of the working of social capital in the communities. The first questions asked in order to map the perceived presence of social groups and networks were therefore limited to asking the students about the existence of such groups and networks, identify their perceived nature (positive or perverse social capital). I also included a question about persons or groups of persons that did not belong to any group in case the students' perception of formal and informal social groups and networks were different from mine. The parents and tutors interviewed got the same question.

On community level (not counting learning circle committees), the most prevalent group mentioned among all were gangs. In total, 17 of the students identified their presence. Other perverse social capital groups identified by several were death squads, paramilitaries and guerrilla members. In all, social capital groups that were in most cases considered negative for the situation and development in the communities, outnumbered by far the perceived existence of positive groups. Among groups and organizations perceived to have a positive impact on their community, five students highlighted international organizations, while others identified sports groups, garbage cleaners and the group of local leaders. Very few mentioned the learning circle, a finding that probably is, as already suggested, related to the fact that they might not perceive the learning circle as a social group or organization but rather a formal institution. The tutors and the parents highlighted the problems with the high level of perverse social capital groups in the two communities, a finding which is backed by the mentioned studies carried out OCHA (2006) Garzón (2005) and (Moser McILwaine, 2000).

The operators, the tutors and scholars such as Dupuy (2008) look into the protective potential of education. Three of my interviewees told me that they were ex-gang members, one of the girls told me that she still was. Among the ex-gang members, two had quit due to the learning circles, while one had started (but then left the gang on a later stage) because of another learning circle student. The girl who is still a member is so regardless of friends or direct influence from learning circle. My sample of interviewees is small, but this finding is interesting in the sense of looking closer into the many factors affecting a young person's choice. For instance, the girl told me that one of the reasons that she was joining the gang in another community in Soacha was that she had no close friends where she lived or in the learning circles. She found the others annoying and not trustworthy, while her friends in the gang she belonged to protected her and stood up for her if she was in trouble. As for the ex-gang member who got recruited through a class mate; he told me that he entered when things started to become really bad at home, indicating that domestic violence and frustration was one of the triggers. To what extent the staff at the learning circles have the capacity to detect and help out in all the cases, is questionable. When I asked the tutors and field staff in Comuna 6 about present or previous gang members, neither he nor the other boy was mentioned. "There are students with drug problems, but no gang members in this learning circle".

Limiting our scope looking at the learning circle level only, the picture becomes quite different. On this level, the most prevalent group is learning circle committees. As all students participate in a committee, organized activities contributing to creation of social capital is to be considered as a compulsory and integrated part of the learning circles. If we compare 32

memberships in committees with one current gang membership and three ex-gang memberships among the students, their organizational affiliation is mostly with what is normally perceived as a positive social capital network. Also other answers throughout the interview tell us something about the existence of social capital. Answers highlighting the importance and value of friendship are closely related to building trust and reciprocity. Developing common rules for the committee work also have a potential of contributing to the development of new sets of norms, contributing to meeting some of the challenges. But again, what happens on learning circle level, is remarkably different from what the students, parents and tutors is taking place on community level in this regard.

6.4 The issue of vulnerability and sustainability

Throughout the interviews and presentation of findings, there are several aspects of impact that differ between the two different communities where I studied the learning circles. Some of these seem to be related to the question of duration and continuity, and says something about the role of vulnerability in ensuring sustainability of the learning circles and their potential impacts. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu focused on the time aspect when he defined social capital by referring to the *duration* of networks: ‘...possession of a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’ (McLean, Schultz and Steger, 2002:5). The main difference in perceived trust and social capital formation in the two communities seems to be related to the aspect of how long they have been up and running and the fact that it was a rupture and change of operator in one of them. First of all it appears to have taken time to establish trust between the learning circles and the community as well as between the different actors within the learning circle. Second, level of trust seems to require continuity in order to be stable. In Comuna 4, there has been a continuous operation of the learning circles for four years, and many of the students have been there longer than the average one - two years. As many seem to like it more in the learning circles than in a regular school, one of their reasons for staying longer seem to be sense of well-being and satisfaction. They had gotten used to the teaching methodology and find the teaching environment, especially how they are treated by their tutors, more tempting than being transferred to a mother school. Most had experienced scolding and yelling in the classroom by previous teachers, and as indicated in the findings, some also reported physical punishment as common in their school. Even though the mother school that they will be transferred to when ready could be another school than the one they have attended before, the idea of leaving the world of the circles seemed to discourage several of the students. The level of trust between students and tutors appeared to be high. Trust between the learning circle and the community where they operate was also as improved throughout the years of operation by field staff and tutors. As the tutors in Comuna 4 said; earlier the students were perceived as trouble makers and losers, now community leaders call for them to participate in community activities and are curious about how they work and progress.

Even though barriers to access such as lack of placements and a families’ economy are important reasons for why parents chose to send their children to learning circles, the element of trust between parents and the learning circles appears to play an important part in Comuna 4 too. Through interviews with mothers and tutors, it seems clear that many parents needed time to acknowledge and appreciate the learning methods. In the beginning they considered the participatory and child-centered methods as a lot of fun with little focus on main subjects. But after a while many of them have noted academic progress as well as improvement in their children’s behaviour. Working in groups and with values like friendship and collaboration have improved passive or aggressive behaviour, and both parents and tutors report positive

changes in many of the children's attitudes. The tutors in Comuna 4 reported on increased participation among the parents both in workshops and other activities since the beginning, indicating that the level of trust created through continuous presence and achievements affects the level of participation in learning circle activities, and thus also to social capital formation on community level.

The situation in Comuna 6 appeared to be different. Even though learning circles were not new to the community, there was as mentioned in the introduction a longer break in the provision of the circles. When I arrived, the circles had as mentioned been up and running again for about half a year. Many of the students started at the same time, but there were also newer, more recently arrived students among the interviewees. More students in Comuna 6 complained about the behaviour of fellow class mates, and as I expressed while presenting the findings, remarkably fewer highlighted the importance of friendship compared to those in Comuna 4. Trust and sense of reciprocity is not necessarily built within six months despite high focus on collaboration and development of social skills. According to the operators and the tutors, parents also express less trust due to short time of operation and prior rupture in provision. Their perception of the circles and the other students attending seem to affect their children's view in several aspects, including how they look upon other students. Even though the two mothers I interviewed in Comuna 6 were quite positive to the circles, they were more sceptical to the methodology than in Comuna 4. That the students e. g do not work with one notebook for each subject, made them worried about their children not having good systems and being able to separate the subjects. Several of the students in Comuna 6 expressed the same concern, and when I asked them what their parents felt, they often repeated the same phrases, to a certain degree confirming my impression of the children's scepticism and discontent in this respect could come from their parents and other adults yet not being convinced that the circles are as good as a normal school. This also appears to be the case for several students when they refer to their parents' view on the other children: Not all children are equally good. Some are disobedient or former street or gang children, others are dirty and filthy.

"It is OK that my daughters go to school with them, but I would not like my children to go to their homes or hang out with them", one mother said.

Such negative perceptions of other children in the learning circles can also be seen as a factor contributing to less focus on the value of friendship and trust needed for creating social capital within the learning circle. Another aspect that contributes to the impression of the differences in perceptions in the two communities, is the students' expression of what is the most positive aspect of the learning circle. Whereas only one of the interviewees from Comuna 4 highlighted the fact that the education was for free, four from Comuna 6 mentioned this. The same applies for the free lunch; only one in Comuna 4 raised this issue, while three from Comuna 6 did. These answers can underpin the findings in recent UN assessments (OCHA, 2006; Garzón, 2005) reporting little presence of national and international development actors, indicating that projects aiming at nutrition for instance has been more absent in Comuna 6. This situation was also confirmed by the community leader behind the *comedor* serving lunch in Comuna 6. And the community leader operating the *comedor* in Comuna 4 reported similar conditions when the learning circles were started up several years earlier, but told me that an increase in number of *comedores* around Cazuca in sector four makes free or highly subsidized lunch available for more students, both within and outside the learning circles. Another aspect that might have contributed to this impression among the student can however also be seen with regard to the aspect of duration: Students in Comuna 4 has learned

to appreciate the learning circles to greater degree than Comuna 6. They seem value the pedagogy and methodology more, and seem to trust each other and the actors more.

6.5 Conclusion

After analyzing and discussing key findings from my fields work with respect to empowerment and social capital formation, impact on individual level seem to be stronger than the impact of the learning circle on community level. For most of the 32 students that I have interviewed, the learning circles have been their only chance of getting access to the formal education system. The learning circles have also been many of the students' first encounter with a school environment who meets them with respect and invites them to participate both within the circle and on community level. And instead of being told what to do, they are invited to think for themselves and take collective action. Both these issues seem to have contributed to changes in attitudes towards education. Several of the students also reported positive changes in behaviour and achievements even though some also reported the opposite. In improving access and equipping the students with social as well as cognitive skills, the learning circles are seen as having an empowering potential. The focus on friendship, collaboration and participation in group work and committees also appear to have strengthened the social capital building, both among students and between students and tutors.

Attempts to involve parents in such social capital formation do however not always seem to be equally successful. Their daily struggle, lack of trust and social cohesion on community level and unfamiliarity with the methodology are among likely reasons identified. So are the presence of perverse social capital networks such as gangs, death squads and illegal armed groups. Large part of the population in the area studied is internally displaced, and fear of who your neighbours are and who they support seem to have affected the parents' ability and willingness to engage. Another possible reason behind lack of commitment among parents in one of the communities is considered to be lack of continuity and the short duration of operation. This finding contributes to strengthen the impression of how important trust is for building social capital. The fact that the learning circles in that community was suspended once, might have made parents more sceptical and less willing to believe that participation in workshops and other activities are worth while. Considering the differences among the students' answers in the two communities, the aspect of trust appear important to children too. They appear to need time to learn and appreciate the methodology as well as getting to know the tutors and fellow students. Social capital formation and the empowerment potential can thus be regarded as dependent on the long term perspective and sustainability of the learning circles. Short term provision can successfully improve the children's' access to education, but if the operators are to be more successful in reaching out the whole community, there are more obstacles that need to be removed. Proven that the operators have the sufficient funding, the obstacles of lack of continuity might be removed. But other factors that affect the overall empowerment impact and social capital formation, such as competing alternatives (work, gangs) and lack of real opportunities for secondary education and future employment, seem to be beyond the reach of the learning circles alone.

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8 Appendix 1: Interview guide in Spanish

Guía de entrevista

NOMBRE Y EDAD:

¿Cuánto tiempo llevas atendiendo los círculos de aprendizaje?

¿Has atendido la escuela normal antes?

¿Hasta cual grado?

¿Dónde naciste? Cuándo llegó tu familia a Soacha?/Sabes cuánto tiempo lleva tu familia en Soacha?

¿Por qué no estas atendiendo a la escuela normal? (costos (transporte, uniforme), seguridad, lejanía, falta de cupos, trabajo)

¿Qué harías si no tuvieras la posibilidad de atender los círculos de aprendizaje?

-
1. ¿Qué has aprendido acá que no aprendiste en la escuela normal?
 2. ¿Cómo te parecen los métodos que usa el tutor?
 3. ¿Qué es la diferencia de un profesor y un tutor para ti?
 4. ¿Qué te gusta de los círculos de aprendizaje?
 5. ¿Cómo crees que te puede servir lo que has aprendido cuando salgas del círculo de aprendizaje?
 6. ¿Qué te parece difícil con los círculos de aprendizaje?
 7. ¿Hay algo que no te gusta de los círculos de aprendizaje? ¿Qué?
 8. ¿Cómo te parecía ir a aprender en la escuela antes?
 9. ¿Cómo te parece ir a aprender en los círculos de aprendizaje ahora?
 10. ¿Qué tan importante te parece la escuela/los círculos de aprendizaje?
 11. ¿Qué tan importante te parece la escuela para tu futuro?
 12. ¿Crees que vas a completar la primaria en una escuela madre?
 13. ¿Crees que vas a tomar el bachillerato después?
 14. ¿Crees que vas a encontrar trabajo cuando seas adulto? ¿Por qué?
 15. ¿Crees que el hecho de aprender te va a servir en otras maneras de sólo ayudarte a conseguir trabajo? Si sí: ¿En que manera?

16. ¿Sientes que has logrado algo en los círculos de aprendizaje que no habías logrado antes? ¿Qué/por qué?
17. ¿Sientes que lograste algo en la escuela normal que no puedes lograr en los círculos de aprendizaje? ¿Qué? ¿Por qué?
18. ¿Estás participando en organizaciones, asociaciones, grupos juveniles o comités en tu comunidad? Si sí: ¿Qué clase? Por qué participas? Si no: ¿Te gustaría participar en actividades de esta clase? ¿Por qué/por qué no?
19. ¿Están participando algunos miembros de tu familia en organizaciones, asociaciones, grupos juveniles o comités en tu comunidad? ¿Cuáles?
20. ¿Crees que se logra algo particular con participación en la comunidad Sí: ¿Qué? No: ¿Por qué no?
21. ¿Crees que participación por parte de ti, tu familia u otros en tu comunidad es importante para los círculos de aprendizaje?
22. ¿Crees que los círculos de aprendizaje son importante para el bienestar de tu comunidad? Si sí: ¿Por qué? Si no: ¿Por qué no?

Comunidad:

23. ¿Si tú o alguien de tu familia necesita ayuda, a quienes preguntan?
 - a. Oficinas públicas
 - b. Dinero, medicinas y ropa
24. Si tú o alguien de tu familia pelean entre si o con amigos ¿como se soluciona? ¿Buscan ayuda de alguien? ¿Tú te comportes diferente a tu familia?
25. Si tú o alguien de tu familia pelean con vecinos o otra gente en la comunidad, ¿cómo se soluciona? ¿Buscan ayuda de alguien? ¿Tú te comportes diferente a tu familia?
26. ¿Cuáles grupos u organizaciones (formales e informales) existen en la comunidad donde vives? Quiero que menciones grupos positivos y negativos.
27. ¿Hay algunas personas que no están en estos grupos u organizaciones que afectan a la comunidad en una manera negativa? ¿Positiva?
28. ¿Cuáles son los problemas más grandes de la comunidad? ¿Cómo se puede solucionar?
29. ¿Cuáles son las cosas más positivas de la comunidad? ¿Cómo se podía fortalecer?

9 Appendix 2: Confidentiality agreement

Acuerdo de Confidencialidad

Este proyecto de entrevistas es para que la investigadora Linda Pérez Bukåsen de la Universidad de Agder, Noruega pueda escribir su tesis. Tú has sido elegido para participar en este proyecto porque eres alguien que tiene información importante. Intentaré evaluar el impacto que tiene los Círculos de Aprendizaje en la vida de los estudiantes que están atendiendo. También voy a evaluar el impacto que tienen los Círculos de Aprendizaje a la comunidad donde se realiza. Todo lo que me cuentes quede entre nosotros. Tus nombres y toda la información que se podrá usar para identificarte van a ser cambiado en el informe final. Tu participación en este proyecto es voluntaria, y puedes negar de participar en el cuando quieras. No crees que al firmar se tenga algún problema ya que te prometo absoluta discreción.

Este acuerdo es para su información. Cuando se firme, se entenderá que las partes están de acuerdo con este acuerdo de confidencialidad.

Entrevistado

_____/_____/2008

Linda P. Bukåsen – Entrevistadora

_____/_____/2008