

Educational Institutions as Socio-Cultural and Economic Engines: A Theoretical Proposal from Community Education in Vulnerable Urban Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical proposal recognizes in educational centers – especially those located in areas of informal urbanity, the latent power of becoming true civilizing centers: devices capable of regenerating the social fabric, improving the local economy and reconstituting the cultural memory of historically fractured communities. From a comparative perspective that dialogues with educational management models such as the Japanese and with Latin American community education practices, a framework is proposed to rethink the school not only as a space for instruction, but as a symbolic territory where identity is reactivated, links are reconstructed and solidarity microeconomies are created. From a qualitative and theoretical-propositional methodology, notions of cultural citizenship, identity, local development and educational architecture are examined, articulating them with socioeconomic realities of peripheral Ecuadorian neighborhoods. The findings suggest that the educational center, open, resignified and linked to its environment, can become the ethical, cultural and economic engine that these communities require to move towards a dignified, cohesive and sustainable life.

Keywords: Community education; Cultural institutions; Social change; Urban vulnerability; Territorial regeneration; Social economy; Cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

Ecuadorian cities, Guayaquil, Quito, Machala, Manta, and so many others that expand with the anxiety of the unfinished, today exhibit the deep traces of an urban growth that has not been the result of a rational order, but of a historical urgency resulting from the massive displacement of rural populations into urban environments that promised, without any guarantee, the mirage of progress. In these irregular geographies, where instability coexists with hope, the school emerges as the only stable vestige of institutionality.

But that school, trapped between the lack of services, territorial violence and pedagogical insufficiency, usually reproduces the same system it seeks to transform. Where urban informality acquires the character of a tragic destiny, education appears not as an emancipatory force, but as a scarce and fragile service.

From this painful observation, and precisely because of it, the ontological question that underpins this work arises: Is it possible that the educational center, rebuilt from community education, becomes the socio-economic and cultural engine capable of regenerating historically depressed sectors?

In Ecuador, the growth of informal urban settlements has been documented as one of the main expressions of territorial inequality, characterized by housing precariousness, labor informality, and limited access to public

services. Recent reports from regional organizations indicate that these contexts concentrate high levels of social vulnerability and institutional weakness, placing the school as one of the few stable state infrastructures in the territory (CEPAL, 2022; ONU-Habitat, 2023).

The answer requires an act of social imagination, but also of conceptual rigor. For this reason, this text proposes an unprecedented articulation between the Japanese civic-cultural model and Latin American community pedagogies, with the purpose of designing an educational paradigm capable of transforming not only school life, but neighborhood, economic and symbolic life as a whole.

Objectives, Research Questions and Contribution of the Study

The main purpose of this article is to rethink the role of the educational center in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability and cultural fragmentation, shifting its traditional understanding as an exclusively instructive institution to its resignification as a cultural, social and ethical device of territorial transformation. From a theoretical-propositional perspective and critical cultural analysis, the study requests the conditions under which the school can become an engine of socioeconomic and cultural regeneration in depressed urban sectors.

General Objective

- To analyze, from a community education and cultural studies approach, the potential of educational centers to act as socio-economic and cultural engines in the regeneration of vulnerable urban territories, through the construction of a theoretical model that articulates pedagogy, culture, social economy and community identity.

Specific Objectives

- To examine the conceptual and normative foundations that allow us to understand the school as a cultural institution and agent of social change in contexts of territorial inequality.
- To analyze the relationships between community education, cultural identity, and local socioeconomic development, based on contemporary academic literature and international and national policy frameworks.
- To propose an integrative theoretical model that conceptualizes the educational center as an articulating device between pedagogy, social economy and culture, aimed at community regeneration in contexts of informal urbanity.

Research Questions

Based on these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- How can schools be resignified as cultural institutions capable of promoting processes of socio-economic and territorial regeneration in vulnerable urban contexts?
- What pedagogical, cultural and economic elements allow the school to articulate with its community environment to support social cohesion and collective identity?
- What contributions does community education offer to rethink the role of the school as a device for social transformation beyond its traditional instructive function?

Original Contribution to the Field

The main contribution of this study is the construction of an integrative theoretical framework that places schools as strategic nodes of cultural and social change in depressed territories, articulating community education, social economy, cultural identity and territorial analysis. Unlike approaches that conceive the school only as a pedagogical space or as an instrument of sectoral public policy, this paper proposes to understand it as a complex cultural institution, capable of activating processes of symbolic, social and economic regeneration. The article expands the field of studies on social change and culture by incorporating education as a central device in the reconfiguration of historically marginalized territories.

This study is framed within the conceptual horizon of the New Educational World (NEW) and is grounded in a hermeneutic mode of reflection developed as part of an R&D+I project at the Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil. From this standpoint, the work advances the normalization of transdisciplinarity and complex thought as constitutive principles of contemporary education, understood not as methodological add-ons but as an educational syncretism capable of integrating knowledge, ethics, and lived experience. The proposal is aligned with the academic and formative objectives of the Doctorate in Education at Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil, particularly within the course Didactic Design and Teaching Innovation, as well as with the Doctorate in Complex Thought and Transdisciplinary Knowledge Construction offered by the Edgar Morin Real World Multiversity, specifically in the course Historical Evolution of Disciplinary Conceptions. In this

context, the study seeks to cultivate real-world competencies and rigorous scholastic inquiry, situating education as a space where complexity, reflexivity, and contextual relevance converge.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is inscribed in the broad territory of qualitative research of a theoretical-propositional nature, where thought describes realities, summons them, tensions them and remakes them. The methodology is not conceived as a series of mechanical steps, it is an interwoven hermeneutical fabric that allows us to understand the school, its community breathing as a philosophical, social and political phenomenon.

Documentary Corpus, made up of three Sources:

Primary Sources:

- Regional and national normative documents related to the right to education, territorial development and social policy.
- Reports from multilateral organizations (UNESCO, ECLAC, World Bank, OECD).
- Ministerial Guidelines and Conceptual Frameworks on Community Education in Latin America.

Secondary Sources:

- Recent academic literature (2019–2025) on community education, territorial cohesion, regeneration of depressed sectors, cultural studies and contemporary pedagogical thought.
- Articles, books and reviews that explore the notion of school as a civilizing device or as a socio-economic articulator.

Philosophical and Conceptual Sources:

- Texts that illuminate the symbolic, ethical and ontological dimension of the community, the territory and human formation.
- This corpus, previously selected and refined, allows for a transversal analysis where the legal, the pedagogical and the cultural are intertwined as interpretative layers of the same phenomenon.

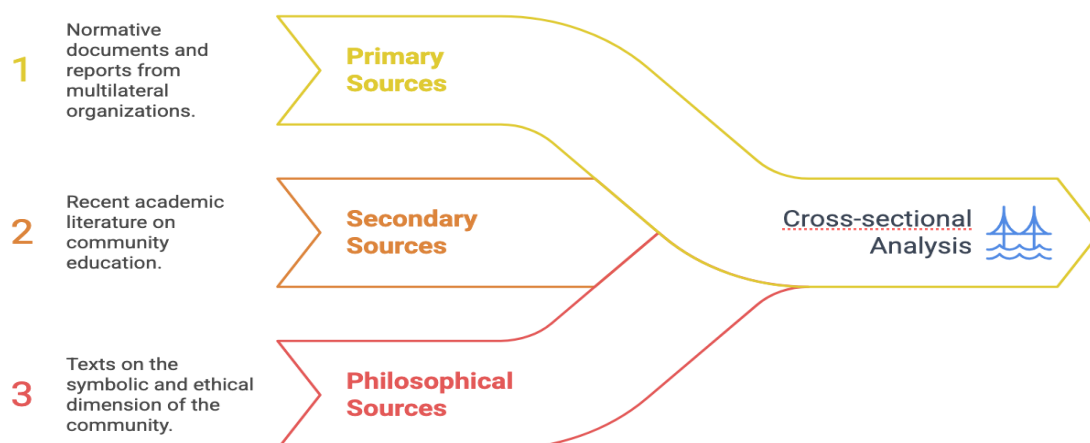


Figure 1. Documentary Corpus

Selection Criteria

The corpus was delimited by four fundamental criteria:

- A temporal criterion, to respond to the contemporary transformations of education and post-pandemic social reconstruction.
- Criterion of relevance, documents were incorporated that dialogue directly with the conceptual axes of the study: community education, territory, urban poverty, public policies, human development and the right to education.

- Reliability criteria, peer-reviewed publications, multilateral organizations, official regulatory frameworks and consolidated academic literature.
- Exclusion criteria, essays without documentary support and materials without editorial review that could compromise the soundness of the analysis.

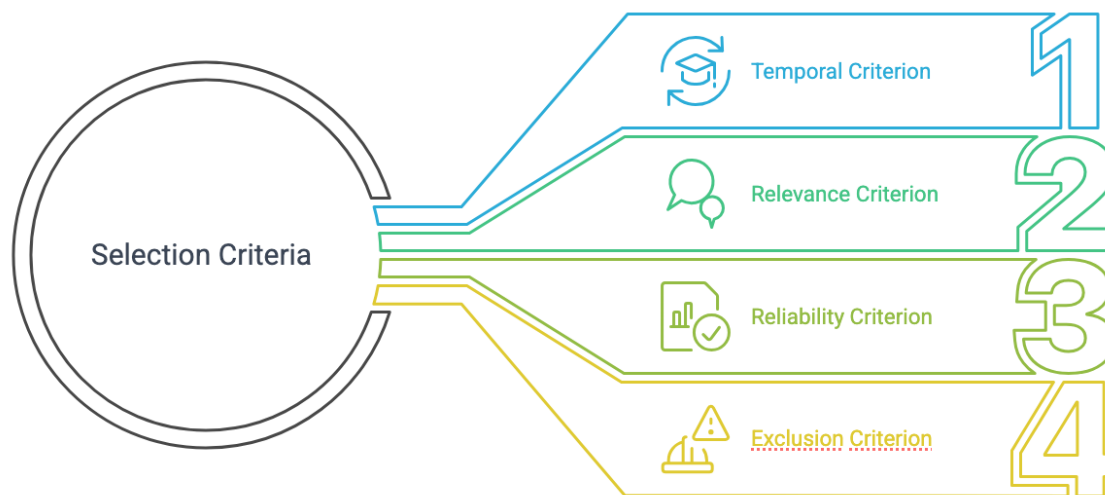


Figure 2: Selection Criteria

Hermeneutical Procedure

The analysis followed a hermeneutical route of three moments, conceived as an interpretative act that seeks to understand the school as a civilizational-emancipatory fulcrum:

Comprehension, deep and contextualized reading, identifying emerging categories linked to the sense of community, territorial reconstruction and the socioeconomic role of the school.

Interpretation, integration of the categories into four theoretical axes (pedagogical, social, economic and cultural), made it possible to clarify how the school becomes an agent of community reconfiguration.

Conceptual projection, formulation of a theoretical proposal where the school is presented as an articulating device between culture, economy and social fabric, capable of activating regeneration processes in vulnerable territories.

This procedure recognizes that interpreting is always recomposing; that to think is, inevitably, to reveal; and that hermeneutics is the bridge that allows the memory of a territory to dialogue with its future.

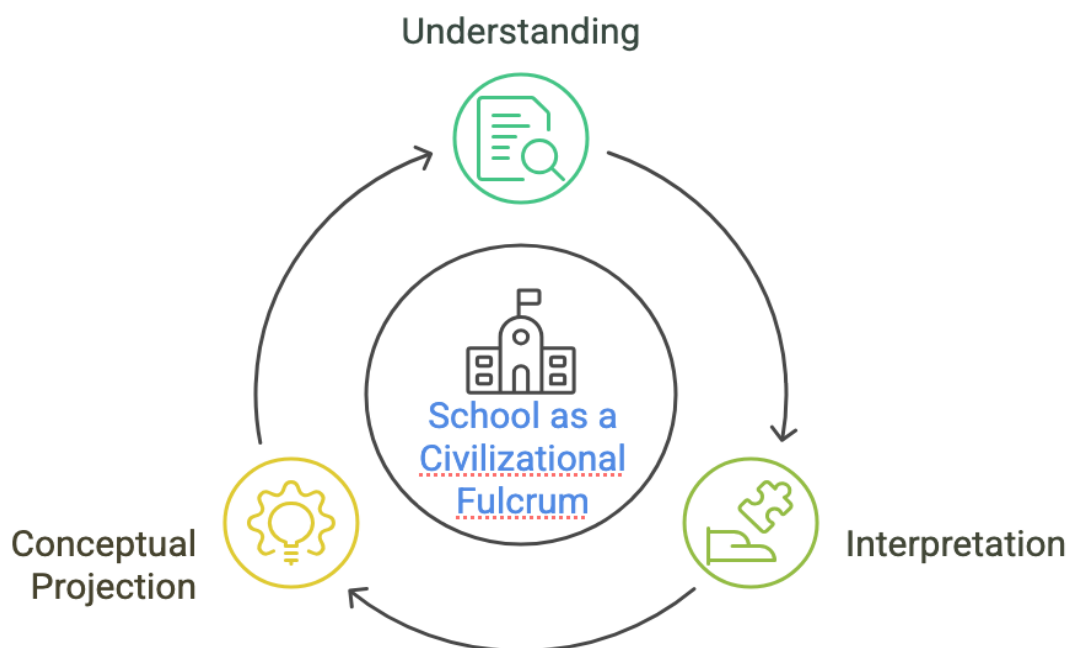


Figure 3: Hermeneutic Procedure

Type of Study

Although a systematic documentary review was not carried out in the strict sense, the theoretical-propositional choice responds to the nature of the phenomenon studied: the need to build a conceptual model capable of illuminating the transformative power of the school in scenarios of socio-territorial fragility.

The absence of empirical sampling is not a shortcoming, but an epistemological decision: the present study seeks to found meaning, not to measure frequency; to open horizons, not to close interpretations.

This article adopts a cultural-critical and hermeneutic approach, grounded in traditions of critical pedagogy and cultural studies that understand education as a historically situated, socially constructed, and politically mediated practice. From this perspective, educational institutions are not treated as neutral or purely instrumental spaces, but as cultural territories where power relations, identities, and social meanings are continuously produced and contested. The study offers a theoretical-propositional contribution, aiming to articulate an interpretive model that conceptualizes educational centers as socio-economic and cultural drivers within vulnerable urban contexts, rather than to generate empirical generalizations or causal claims. Accordingly, the methodological strategy privileges theoretical analysis, critical interpretation of canonical and contemporary literature, and conceptual synthesis as legitimate modes of inquiry. This approach is justified by the exploratory and normative nature of the research problem, which requires the construction of an analytical framework capable of illuminating complex cultural processes and offering orientation for future empirical research and policy discussions, rather than the validation of predefined hypotheses.

Political Legal Framework

Thinking of the school as a socio-economic and cultural engine implies recognizing that its transformative power is not only born from pedagogy or the community spirit that surrounds it, but also from the normative framework that legitimizes, sustains and projects it. Where the right is articulated with education, the school ceases to be an isolated institution and becomes a territory of citizenship: a space where the subject recognizes himself as the holder of rights and builder of the common.

Right to Education and State Guarantee

The starting point is the human right to education, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 13), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 28 and 29), these instruments converge in an inescapable mandate, *i.e.*, education is not a provision of assistance, but a fundamental condition of human dignity.

Educational centers located in depressed territories cannot be understood as deficit services, but as ethical infrastructures where the state promise of equity is materialized.

Cultural Rights and the Right to Territory

The school also operates as a cultural asset based on the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 4 and SDG 11), and the Latin American notion of the right to territory, understood as equitable access to symbolic goods, spaces of identity and collective memory.

The school, when embedded in the cultural fabric of the neighborhood, becomes a laboratory of belonging: a place where the community reworks its history, disputes its meaning and reimagines its future.

Ecuadorian Regulatory Framework

In the case of Ecuador—the geopolitical sphere to which the reflection of the manuscript is attached—the legal architecture that supports this proposal is the Constitution of Ecuador (arts. 26–29), which guarantees education as a human right, state obligation, and social priority; the Organic Law on Intercultural Education (LOEI) supports the articulation between education, culture, community and integral development; national development plans and sectoral policies that link territory, social cohesion and human development.

This framework turns schools into strategic public actors capable of energizing processes of inclusion, participation and community reconstruction.

Regulatory Implications for Schools

From this legal architecture, the school acquires four political functions:

- Reparative function, addressing structural inequalities through educational territoriality policies.
- Redistributive function, guaranteeing equitable access to academic, technological and cultural goods.
- Community function, promoting horizontal governance between the State, school, families and local actors.
- Economic function, activating local development circuits through training, entrepreneurship and productive culture programs.

These functions are not concessions of the system, but normative requirements derived from the right to education and the international commitments assumed by the State.

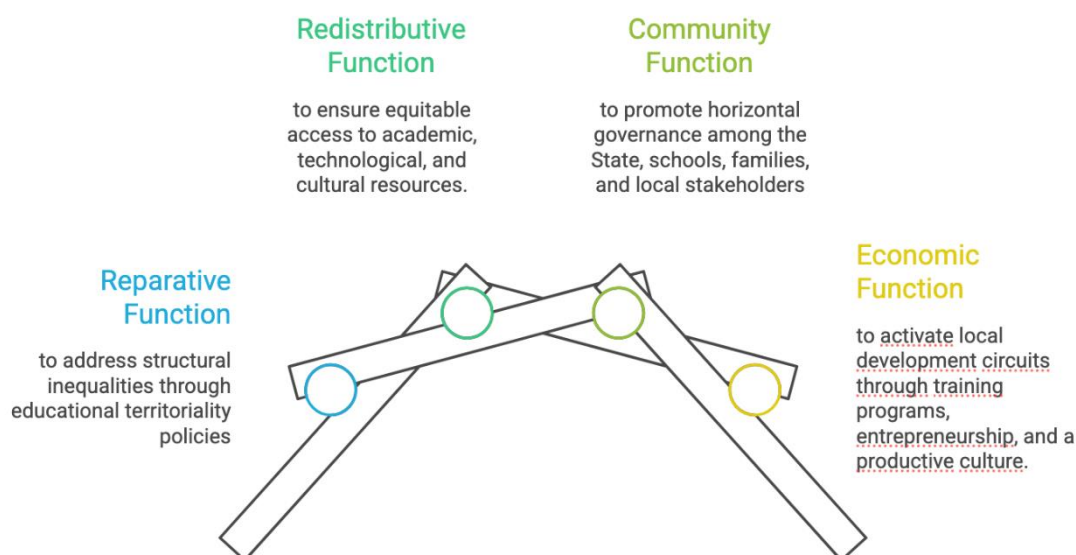


Figure 4: Political functions of educational institutions

Political-Legal Projection of the Proposal

The proposed theoretical model invites a rereading of the role of the school in a citizen key. The educational institution not only transmits knowledge: it becomes a guarantor of rights, mediator of symbolic conflicts, agent of territorial cohesion and platform of social mobility, *i.e.*, the construction of the New Educational World (NME).

Its action is legally legitimized, but it is culturally enhanced, the law provides the structure; the community gives meaning. Where the two converge, the territory is reborn.

Theoretical Development

Community Education

Community education is not a simple pedagogical alternative; it is in its essence, an act of restitution of the collective word, it is where formal education; It stands on the verticality of the curriculum and the distance between knowledge and life, community education introduces an epistemological rupture: it gives back to the subject the right to learn from his world, his urgencies, his memory and his ways of inhabiting the territory.

As he points out (Freire, 2005), educating in the community implies uncovering the truth that poverty tries to silence. It also means rescuing everyday knowledge as a matrix of social transformation and dismantling the colonial idea that legitimate knowledge can only be born from traditional school forms. In vulnerable territories, this pedagogy constitutes an ethic of hope: a space where identity is reconstructed, dignity is recovered and the community once again recognizes itself as the author of its own destiny and puts an end to basic inequality.

In the last two decades, community education in Latin America has been resignified as a strategy of territorial intervention in contexts of urban exclusion. Recent research shows that these experiences strengthen community agency, collective identity, and the articulation between education, culture, and local development, particularly in peripheral neighborhoods (Torres, 2019).

Development of Social Economy

Community regeneration is a profound transformation of the way people understand, practice and inhabit the economy; Community regeneration also implies a profound transformation of the way people understand, practice and signify the economy in their daily lives. In this sense, the school, as the vital center of the neighborhood, must be open to a financial literacy that transcends the mere mathematical-accounting technique to be configured as an ethical, cultural and critical training in the relationship with money, work and consumption. This perspective is close to what Paredes-Riera (2024) calls financial scholasticism, understood as a formative approach that articulates economics, philosophy and social responsibility, aimed at developing conscious financial habits, economic autonomy and ethical discernment in the face of market logics. From this point of view, school economic education is not reduced to the acquisition of instrumental skills, but is constituted as a pedagogy of daily life, capable of contributing to individual economic dignity and the sustainability of the community material.

The social economy is not an abstract instruction, it is a pedagogy of everyday life; it involves teaching how to read the market from a perspective of justice, how to understand the value of honest work, how to make economic decisions that do not mortgage the future (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). It is to articulate academia with local enterprises, generating imbrication between youth, families and the neighborhood microeconomy; the school that opens up to its community ceases to be an inert one to become a living organism that breathes to the rhythm of the neighborhood, that nourishes its economy and that is nourished by it (Morin, 2001).

Citizenship, Culture and Identity

In areas where violence, lack and uncertainty erode daily life, cultural identity is not an ornamental concept: it is a condition of symbolic survival; it is to recognize oneself as part of a network of shared meanings, affections and memories; narrative milestone and territory of claim for dignity.

Identity, as García Canclini reminds us, is not a folkloric ornament, it is belonging. When it fractures, the community enters a state of moral metastasis that enables violence, apathy, and disintegration. The school is the first space where one learns to coexist, it must be reconstructed as a scenario of belonging, a laboratory of collective identity and a refuge where students can recognize themselves as protagonists of their socio-cultural history (García Canclini, 1995).

Analysis and Theoretical Proposal

The fundamental premise emerges: education, in territories where poverty has become a landscape and violence has acquired the texture of everyday life, cannot continue to be a simple public service; it must become a civilizing event. It is not enough to instruct; it is necessary to recompose. It is not only literacy; What is needed is to reconfigure the identity and emotional fabric of entire communities. Where the city has failed, the school must assume with ethical depth and pedagogical rigor the mission of reinventing collective life.

This theoretical proposal assumes that schools can and should be transformed into engines of socioeconomic, cultural and moral regeneration, provided that they are rebuilt from four essential paradigms:

Pedagogical Paradigm: The School as an Ontological Territory of Human Development

The educational experience can no longer be treated as a linear and homogeneous process, alien to the biographical rhythms of the child and adolescent. Montessori had already warned that development occurs in stages, each with specific sensitivities, differentiated needs and its own life horizons. To ignore these stages is to condemn education to indifferentiation and, with it, to ineffectiveness (Montessori, 1995).

From this perspective, it is proposed to restore the triadic structure of education, separating, in infrastructure and in pedagogical ethos, the spaces destined to:

- Childhood (0–6 years), unconscious and then conscious absorption, emotional and sensory basis of the subject.
- Childhood (6–12 years), a privileged time of moral imagination, belonging, structured curiosity and cultural incorporation.
- Adolescence (12–18 years), turbulent territory; it forges social identity, vocation, autonomy and recognition of the other.
- These transitions build differentiated pedagogical projects:
- primary education, which starts from initial education as a space for ethical and community training,
- secondary school as a space of cultural expansion and vital definition.

This distinction does not fragment the system, it gives it relevance and coherence with the architecture of the human being, i.e., education ceases to be a bureaucratic journey and becomes an anthropological journey.

Social Paradigm: The School as an Architecture of Belonging

In the peripheral neighborhoods, identity is not inherited, it is fought. Family fractures, daily insecurity, and the absence of the state erode individuals' ability to feel part of something bigger than themselves. This implies reinstating practices that resignify collective life:

- shared care activities,
- civic rituals that transcend formality,
- active participation in the maintenance of the educational space,
- neighborhood projects where school, family and community build the common good together.

In addition to the care of the classroom, the care of the neighborhood and the care of the city is added, i.e., the school ceases to be a fenced building and becomes a concrete metaphor for what the community should be: a space that is honored, protected and shared.

Economic Paradigm: Literate Mind and Life

In a country where millions of young people enter the informal economy early, it is essential that schools teach the interweaving of abstract knowledge with concrete tools, economic and domestic literacy, i.e., managing income, planning expenses, building responsible consumption habits, understanding the ethical functioning of exchange, generating legitimate enterprises, strengthening the family and neighborhood economy.

It is not about turning the school into a business incubator, it is about creating a space for economic dignity, where young people discover that legality is not an obstacle, but a path to autonomy.

Reactivate economic microcircuits by linking real skills in a defined context between educational center and local commerce; without dependence on gifts, dignifying the essence of the citizen.

Various studies have shown that the incorporation of social and solidarity economy approaches in educational contexts contributes to the strengthening of local productive capacities, the development of contextualized economic skills and the generation of community-based economic circuits. In this sense, the school can operate as a mediator between training, work, and territory, particularly in informal urban economies (Laville & Eynaud, 2019; Duque et al. 2021).

Cultural Paradigm: The School as a Symbolic Territory of the Nation

In areas of informal urbanity, thousands of young people grow up without access to museums, theaters, libraries or sports centers; Culture becomes a distant privilege and the school must be the first cultural territory of the citizen. This involves:

- arts and science clubs,
- systematic sports practices,
- cultural festivals and community theaters,
- musical formations,
- local exhibitions,
- symbolic spaces where identity is named and celebrated.

Japan demonstrates that culture, when it is a constituent part of the school, generates discipline, cohesion and a sense of purpose. In the Ecuadorian context, this model acquires a profoundly emancipatory dimension: culture as resistance, as affirmation, as possibility. Identity ceases to be a dead letter and becomes a flag.

In the Japanese context, the school has historically been conceived as a space for civic and community education, particularly through moral education (*dōtoku kyōiku*) and school practices oriented towards collective care, shared responsibility and social belonging. Recent studies show that these dynamics contribute to community cohesion and the early internalization of social values, reinforcing the link between the educational institution and the territorial environment (MEXT, 2017; Takayama, 2020).



Figure 5: Paradigms for The Reconstruction of Educational Institutions

Synthesis of the Theoretical Proposal

The social and economic regeneration of depressed areas cannot be conceived without the profound reconfiguration of their educational centers, they must become the symbolic, cultural and economic heart of the community, interweaving: pedagogy of development, shared social identity, ethical and solidarity economy, active cultural citizenship.

The school is not a gray work, it is, from Gestalt epistemology, that which is unfinished and yet to be elaborated, in the here and now; it is a symbolic architecture capable of rethinking the worldview in the tenor of *Sumak Kamsay*, i.e., it is to transform the destiny of a territory.

DISCUSSION

The School as a Cultural Institution and a Device for Social Change

The theoretical results of this study allow us to reaffirm that the school, far from being a neutral or merely technical institution, operates as a cultural device traversed by relations of power, meaning and identity. In this sense, the proposal dialogues with the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu, who conceives of educational institutions as spaces for the reproduction, but also for the possible transformation, of the cultural and symbolic capital that structures social inequalities. Rethinking the educational center as a socio-economic and cultural engine implies disputing this reproductive logic, orienting pedagogical action towards symbolic redistribution and the reconfiguration of the community habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

In this sense, the concept of real skills extends the traditional understanding of competencies by emphasizing their manifestation through concrete human relationships and socially situated modes of behavior. From a cultural perspective, real skills are not reduced to instrumental performance but are expressed as observable practices embedded in community life, cooperation, and ethical interaction. This approach reinforces the argument that educational institutions function as socio-cultural engines insofar as they enable the development of contextually grounded capabilities that transcend formal instruction and acquire social meaning (Paredes-Riera, 2020).

From this perspective, the school not only transmits legitimized knowledge, but also contributes to defining what knowledge, practices, and memories are culturally valid. The institutional resignification proposed in this article is therefore inscribed in a critical reading of education as a space of cultural struggle, where meanings, identities and horizons of the future are disputed.

Community Education, Identity, and Cultural Capital

The emphasis on community education allows us to deepen the identity dimension of the educational process, understood not as a static feature, but as a situated cultural construction. In line with Stuart Hall's contributions, community identity is configured through discursive practices, shared memories and experiences of belonging that are constantly updated in the school space. The school, when it is opened to the territory, becomes a privileged place for the production of collective narratives capable of counteracting the symbolic effects of social exclusion (Hall, 1996).

Likewise, the proposal dialogues with the notion of cultural capital by broadening its understanding beyond formal schooling. Community education allows us to recognize and legitimize local knowledge, cultural practices and solidarity economies that have historically been devalued by the traditional education system. In this way, the educational center is configured as a space for cultural translation between academic knowledge and community knowledge, strengthening social cohesion and the sense of belonging.

Territory, Educational Spatiality and Social Regeneration

One of the central contributions of the study lies in the articulation between education and territory. Following Henri Lefebvre, space is not conceived as a mere physical support, but as a social production loaded with meanings, relationships and practices. From this point of view, the school is simultaneously a material, symbolic and lived space, and its architecture—physical and relational—has a direct impact on the educational and community experience (Lefebvre, 1991).

The regeneration of depressed urban sectors cannot be understood, then, without attending to the spatial dimension of education. The school, conceived as a territorial node, has the capacity to reorganize social, cultural and economic flows, becoming an anchor point for the reconstruction of the community fabric. This reading reinforces the idea that educational infrastructure is not an accessory element, but an ethical and political component of the process of social transformation.

Tensions, Limits and Scope of the Proposed Model

Although the theoretical model developed offers an integrative vision of the role of schools in community regeneration, it is necessary to recognize its limits and tensions. In line with Henry Giroux's warnings, there is a risk of overloading the school with responsibilities that exceed its institutional capacities if it is not accompanied by coherent public policies and sustained state action (Giroux, 2011).

From an epistemological standpoint, recent work has emphasized the need to articulate complexity thinking with ethical reflection and environmental awareness in order to address contemporary educational challenges. In this framework, education is understood as a transdisciplinary space where philosophy, complexity, and socio-environmental responsibility converge, enabling institutions to respond to systemic crises through situated, ethical, and context-sensitive practices. Such an approach reinforces the view of educational centers as catalysts of socio-cultural transformation, insofar as they integrate ethical discernment, plural knowledge systems, and territorial realities into their pedagogical and institutional dynamics (Paredes-Riera et al., 2025).

Likewise, the implementation of the community approach faces structural resistance derived from technocratic educational models, standardization logics and budgetary restrictions. However, these tensions do not invalidate the proposal, but rather underline the need to understand education as a field of cultural and political dispute, where transformations are gradual, conflictive and necessarily situated.

In this sense, the scope of the model does not lie in its mechanical replicability, but in its ability to offer an analytical framework that allows us to rethink the school as a strategic cultural institution in processes of social change, particularly in contexts of high territorial vulnerability.

Implications for Cultural Analysis and Social Change

This model contributes to cultural analysis by conceptualizing educational centers as active cultural infrastructures rather than neutral institutional spaces, foregrounding their role in the production of meanings, identities, and social practices within specific territorial contexts. By situating schools at the intersection of culture, economy, and community life, the model enables a relational reading of education that connects everyday practices with broader structures of power and inequality. In terms of social change, the framework redefines education not as a linear instrument of upward mobility, but as a situated process of collective transformation, where schools function as mediators between cultural reproduction and social innovation. This perspective shifts the locus of change from abstract policy reforms to locally embedded educational practices, emphasizing the capacity of educational institutions to foster cultural agency, social cohesion, and context-sensitive forms of development.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study had a main purpose to analyze the potential of schools to act as socio-economic and cultural engines in urban territories characterized by social vulnerability and symbolic fragmentation. From a theoretical-propositional approach and critical cultural analysis, the results allow us to affirm that the school can be understood not only as a pedagogical institution, but as a strategic cultural device capable of influencing processes of social change and territorial regeneration.

First, the analysis shows that the resignification of the educational center as a cultural institution allows us to dispute the traditional logics of reproduction of inequalities that have historically characterized educational systems. By recognizing the school as a space of symbolic production, its function is expanded beyond the transmission of formal knowledge, placing it as an environment where identities are constructed, community knowledge is legitimized, and relationships of belonging are reconfigured. This perspective is especially relevant in contexts where social exclusion has eroded collective pledges and equitable access to cultural capital.

Secondly, the articulation between community education, culture and identity shows that educational processes acquire greater transformative power when they are organically linked to the territory. The school, by opening up to its social environment, can operate as a node of community cohesion that favors participation, cultural recognition and the activation of local economic dynamics based on principles of solidarity and social justice. In this sense, the study reinforces the idea that socio-economic regeneration cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural processes that shape the sense of community.

The incorporation of the spatial dimension allows us to conclude that the infrastructure and symbolic organization of educational centers significantly affect the educational and community experience. Conceiving the school as a socially produced space implies recognizing that its design, use and appropriation influence the way in which subjects relate to knowledge, to others and to the territory, i.e., the regeneration of depressed urban sectors requires considering the school as a central element in the reconfiguration of the social and cultural life of the environment.

The study recognizes that the proposed theoretical model faces structural limits associated with rigid institutional frameworks, technocratic educational policies, and material constraints. These margins do not invalidate its relevance, they underline the need to understand education as a field of cultural and political dispute, where transformations are gradual and situated. In this framework, the main contribution of the article lies in offering an analytical approach that allows us to rethink the school as a key cultural institution in the processes of social change, providing relevant conceptual elements for future research and for the design of educational policies sensitive to the territory and cultural diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis developed, the following general guidelines are proposed for the formulation of contextualized educational policies and practices:

1. *Recognize schools as cultural and community actors*, integrating their pedagogical function with initiatives of social participation, cultural production, and territorial articulation.
2. *Incorporate critical and solidarity-based economic education approaches* into institutional educational projects, promoting financial literacy oriented towards social responsibility, cooperation and sustainability.
3. *Strengthen the link between school and community*, through programs that articulate local knowledge, territorial needs, and training processes, especially in vulnerable urban contexts.
4. *To promote future empirical research*, which allows contrasting and expanding the proposed theoretical model, exploring its applicability in different sociocultural contexts.

These recommendations do not intend to establish universal normative guidelines, but to offer **analytical criteria** that guide educational interventions sensitive to the cultural and social dynamics of each territory.

Community education restores what the city forgot, awakens what the neighborhood has silenced and reconstructs what history broke.

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