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## **Hip hop in Cuenca. Cultural Expressions, elements and identities**

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**Abstract.** This ethnographic research will allow us to enter the Hip Hop movement in Cuenca from a social perspective. Its characteristics, identities, artistic and cultural expressions will be known through its elements. Their needs will be made visible as part of the urban cultures of Cuenca, in order to understand how they influence society, whether or not they are excluded, whether or not they enjoy privileges as subjects of law. In this qualitative study, the ethnography technique is applied, whose main objective is to learn about the history of hip hop in the city, its beginnings, the pioneers of the genre; For this we will contextualize this group in the world and we will know the elements that compose it such as: Graffiti, Rap, Break Dance and Turmablism, also called DJing. This study also tries to examine the communication processes and the participation of the hip hop movement in the public space in which decisions are made on matters of interest and how the forms of participation in the construction of public policies are distinguished. Terms such as urban cultures, youth cultures, counterculture and public space are defined to classify hip hop within them, showing how the identity of young people in this genre is constructed.

**Keywords.** Urban Cultures, Hip Hop, Elements, Identity, Public Space

### **Introduction**

This research recognizes the cultural practices and artistic expressions of urban hip hop culture in the youth of Cuenca, in order to understand their influence in Cuenca society and in turn investigate the reason why they are excluded and made invisible in the processes of change that allow them to become subjects of rights.

The study of this movement in Cuenca-Ecuador is important because they have positioned themselves significantly within the city, since organizational processes are created around it autonomously, in order to position hip hop within a cultural movement that transforms city territories to change the image that the population has of this urban culture.

We are in a stage where emerging cultures have built new spaces of sociability, their communication processes are hidden and they are constantly creating new signifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, use of public space, among others, which have different meanings, and which in turn, they contribute to create other identities; precisely these identities speak of the world and the way of living it in the daily course, they speak of the present and how they appropriate this special moment in history and how in their daily life they build the future.

The research field is focused on urban hip-hop culture in Cuenca, where its identity features and expressions are addressed.

The methodology used in this qualitative research starts from the ethnographic method to identify and recognize the diverse urban cultures and especially the hip hop movement in Cuenca, visible in the public space, which resignify alterity, difference and territoriality, forces us to highlight the importance and recognition between cultural identity.

Ethnography is used, with which it is intended to understand and recognize the realities of young people. This study allowed us to see the route that enables the knowledge of aspects of urban hip hop culture from the voice of the young people themselves; exercise that is done from the understanding of their expressions, gestures, rituals, commitments, from their ways of perceiving and relating to the world.

In the words of (Rockwell, 2009, p. 21) ethnography allows “to better understand their own worlds in relation to the others, it is to document the undocumented of social reality”; Hence, the comprehensive process of experience requires an immersion in situated hip hop culture. Carrying out this ethnography from the urban perspective represents taking a tour of the city and the spaces that are related to this urban expression; places that take on meaning for the encounters of those who are part of it; places where collectives meet and weave social networks and where there are hegemonic action references such as rap music, clothing brands, body brands.

This research combines text recognition and recording of observations on site. The first, accounts for the collection and reading of informative sources such as texts, articles, advertisements, photographs, videos, films, documentaries, songs, productions referenced by the hip hop movement, in which key actors, lyrics, sentiments were identified, thoughts, ideologies and programming that made it possible to access concerts or cultural and artistic events. The second, from the direct visit to the sites where you interact with the hoppers, where the voices of the young people are collected.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **General theories**

#### **Urban Cultures and Public Space**

Public space is constituted as any context in which socialization relationships are established between two or more entities, where in turn experiences of various kinds are presented, not only as a character classification framed in geographical limitations, but its use, although it is constituted with a purpose that varies depending on each typology presented, it is generated as part of a compound reality as something that goes beyond everyday life and is based on its common use (Brenna & Campos, 2015).

Alternatively, these same authors substantiate their own claim, regarding privacy seen in a commonly used environment, as part of the well-being principle of human psychosocial development. In this regard, they indicate that:

Today public space is eroded by the breakdown of social ties, it becomes a container filled to the brim with floating fear and despair desperately seeking a way out. And fear or fear does not unite people, but rather reinforces the mechanisms of privatization and cloistered social life. And once the task of dealing with human existential deprivation has been privatized by leaving it to individual resources, individual fears can only be counted one by one, but not shared or condensed into a common cause or a new kind of joint action. (p. 163).

It should be noted that public space is made up of the need for interaction between human beings beyond their own contexts of relationships, but it is permissive to carry out various activities and to establish somewhat profound dialectical environments, where generate diverse opinion matrices, typical of contexts with freedom of expression indices appropriate to the dictates of a democratic and universal nature (Garriz & Schroeder, 2014).

This phenomenon is constituted as an integrating element of the different experiences presented in cultures, where its strategic use allows the adequate construction of a collective identity, starting from the humanization of the context of development itself and the granting of a properly consolidated identity in that sense. , which has generated a broadly positive impact on the constitution of the psychosocial archetypes of those who live in each different environment of action (Echeverri & Pinzón, 2010).

The public space allows introspection and self-recognition, based on its identifying quality of the own sense of being, where constant experiences are exchanged that differentiate or redefine one's personality in its performance, since aspects such as the values of coexistence are adequately consolidated within this type of formative context of the cultures and subcultures that develop around themselves (Díaz & Sousa, 2015).

In this sense, Boladeras (2001) highlights the link between public space and public opinion, these two elements are configured within the symbolic and communicative interaction they generate, highlighting the relationship they have with power and politics. Public space is configured as "an area of our social life in which something like public opinion can be built" and public opinion when "citizens behave as public (...) and agree freely without pressure, (...) and freely publish their opinion" (p. 53).

It is necessary to highlight that public space also constitutes a base for the exchange of products and services, under pre-defined requirements, which applies to the perspective of placement in the context of marketing by companies and institutions that seek to be part of the Everyday aspects of the lives of their audiences with diverse relationships (García-Doménech, 2015).

It is possible to infer then, that public spaces are consolidated as meeting places, which can go from squares to churches or institutions, where experiential needs and symbology exchanges are manifested, where individuals and organizations constantly interact with each other, from various Communicative perspectives, ranging from mere talk to active and continuous marketing.

Urban cultures are an important part of the population, rooted in new generations, where young people group together, look for attachments, similar tastes, talents and spaces where they can develop their initiatives, creativity and, above all, defend their positions against any fact to through its mode of expression.

If urban cultural history and cultural criticism of the city configure fields of knowledge that are always precarious and have indefinite edges, entering them necessarily implies a joint exploration of what one wants to know and of the instruments with which it could be done. Because more than a disciplinary field, which would entail a set of specific and stable theoretical postulates and methodological instruments, the themes of urban culture integrate a field of tensions between differentiated approaches and perspectives, which are taking shape in the interpretive trade itself, always tentative, with their object of knowledge and that they need to be subject, therefore, to permanent revision and confrontation". (Gorelik, 2004)

The most accurate concept is that of Robert E. Park (1967) "the city is, rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organized attitudes and feelings that

are inherent in these customs and that are transmitted through this tradition. In other words, the city is not a mere physical mechanism or an artificial construction. It is involved in the life process of the people who compose it: it is a product of nature, and in particular, of human nature” quoted by (Monge, 2007).

Social ties result in a segmentation of people who relate according to their tastes. The urban area is transformed into a space for expression. "In them their traditions reproduce and change, the most complex exchanges of multiethnicity and multiculturalism unfold" (García, 1996).

When we talk about groups that are formed according to their affinities, they do so in the field of communication, culture and the city. This means that:

Cities are privileged spaces to understand the dynamics of culture, the new modes of socialization and human interaction, social movements, collective identities, the ways of being and imagining of a society; but, also, the diverse modes of expression, symbolization, production of meanings and the social uses of communication (Pereira, 1995, p. 11).

In the public space we could say that culture is developing and constructing its own thought (Quiguanás, et al., 2013). Carrión defines it as “an environment or scene of social conflict that may have one function or another, depending on the social and political weights” (Carrión, 2004, p. 3). We often associate this term with a physical place, for example, a park, when in reality it is the constant development of circumstances that revolve around society.

### **Hip Hop as a cultural expression**

Within the context of countercultures, Hip Hop is located as a form of shared expression among various groups of people constituted in any environment of social relationship on the globe, based on the need to generate artistic manifestations of a cultural nature and as countercultures and discourses of Opposition to systematic environments, which is frequent in urban socialization contexts (Facuse, Urrutia, & Tijoux, 2012).

It is necessary to highlight that Hip Hop has its origins in North American cities like New York at the end of the sixties, where countercultural achievements adopted this form of popular expression frequent among marginalized sectors of the city, based on the need to generate parameters of protests against the inadequate attention in favor of improving the quality of life indices present in the lower class people of this nation, which is why, it is established that music can emit messages of awareness and that provide a context for all the deeper of the actual development reality, where the use of everyday language is presented as an added value (Facuse, Urrutia, & Tijoux, 2012).

Since then, an adaptation of this musical genre to its own realities is evident in underdeveloped cities around the world, where the compositional and rhythmic parameters are derived from a universality, improvisation, which manifests itself from the intrinsic expressions of each interpreter, manifests from his own naturalness present in reality, which is given anaturalness of his own rhythm and generates an adequate and systemically accepted identity among his followers (Moraga & Solorzano, 2008).

However, it should be noted that Hip Hop, as a counterculture, does not only refer to the use of music as a form of expression related to the lifestyle of certain communities in popular areas, but also forms of graphic and textual composition are added. A wardrobe exhibited by the followers is adopted, with the variations relative to each culture, and graffiti is integrated, at the end of the 20th century, seen as meanings of the subjective perceptions of the followers of these urban movements (Gómez-Abarca, 2014).

Likewise, it is necessary to take into account that gender is a somewhat delicate subject within these genres, as there is a predominance of a macho character from the perspective of interpreter and broadcaster of realities, where women were displaced, as a secondary entity that, although it may have typical characteristics of these realities, there were certain restrictions to its location as own producers of realistic content (Garcés, 2011).

### **Hip hop - Elements and Features**

The urban culture hip-hop is born from the own definition made of it by the young people of this culture, who define it specifically as the set of expressions and artistic-contestation meanings that take place in the urban space to publicly explain dreams, ideals and social discontent typical of the sociocultural conditions in which its executors move. (Moraga & Solorzano, 2008).

About the origins of hip-hop, this author maintains that "The main precursor of hip-hop culture is Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant who arrived in the Bronx in 1967, bringing with him certain concepts and artistic-cultural resources that would define the culture. hip-hop as such." (Moraga & Solorzano, 2008)

This movement from its origins is made up of four branches, disciplines, or fundamental elements that shape urban culture, where they create the alchemy of expression, in which young people are grouped and identified:

MC, MCing or Emceein. - It is the master of ceremony who animates the party and the Rap singer in the oral, recitation and singing part, the, vocalist of the lyric in the hip-hop music genre, is called rapper, the one who raps with rhymes written or improvised on the spot, participate in "cockfights" a kind of competition to find out who is the best, demonstrating their Freestyle.

DJing or Deejayin. - In the auditory and musical, he is usually the music producer, he is associated with the DJ "Disc Jockey" Kool Herc as the "father of hip-hop", creator of the beats and samples that set the rhythm to four beats of 16 intervals, rhythmic beats of loops breaks and the particular thing of the DJ is the Scratch effect that is performed in the turntables when the vinyl record goes back.

Break Dance, Breaking. - Broken Dance, in relation to physical and dance, street style, a combination of steps and original movements, fast turns, postures on the ground, the head and back; stunts and expressions of sympathy, skills that are demonstrated on the track competing with peers to win the support of the public.

Graffiti - The painting is the identity and the style, related to the spray on the wall, bright colors, letters with different styles. Oversized drawings, the firms are called Tag, they are related in two aspects: vandalism and artistic. A series of illustrations with concepts of rebellion, protest, related to the clandestine, illegal, appropriation of spaces, if it were not so, it loses its essence and would only be muralism.

Aáron Brick exposes in his research on Latin hip-hop that, throughout its history, hip-hop music has been expressed in various sub-styles of great diversity. In the beginning, street parties, block parties, hosted DJs who played records with their own devices, while MCs warmed up the wave with energetic commercials and songs. (Brick, 2005, p. 2)

### **Hip hop in Cuenca-Ecuador**

According to Vazquez (2019), hip hop culture originates in Cuenca due to the strong influence of foreigners thanks to the migratory processes that characterized and characterize

Latin American societies, as well as the processes of globalization and the development of the internet and the legacy of characters representing culture at the national and local levels.

The first Cuenca figure to appear in the national context of hip hop emerged in the late years was Henry Novillo (Novi-Noví) a 19-year-old man who learned the culture through videos that his brother sent him from the United States, concomitant to the fact that rap was in a boom stage in Ecuador, thanks to rappers like AU-D and Gerardo Mejía, renowned artists of the genre in the country. The popularity of rap allowed hip hop expressions to become evident in different private and public settings such as discos, private parties or local events (Vazquez, 2019).

Vazquez (2019) citing (Ortega, 2016), accounts for the first visual hip hop production in Cuenca by Novillo and the collaboration of characters such as DJ Oswaldo Morocho and MC Blanco, which were followed by others such as the album *Rap & Reggae Cuenca Style*; in which they capture the emancipatory message of hip hop against violence and drugs and in favor of the adoption of a culture shaped by music, graffiti and dance; It also points out the influence of the movement in the institutionalization of the national hip-hop day as of February 28, 2004, which is housed at the national level.

The forerunner of hip hop culture in Cuenca is Henry Novillo known as Novi-Noví, thanks to the fact that his older brother migrates to the United States and begins to send cassettes of vhs, music, clothes and everything related to hip-hop; He formed the first group of break dance in the late 80's called "Uncensored" who imitated the steps seen in the videos, so the first element that takes place in Cuenca is break dance.

In 1994 Novillo began to write his lyrics and sing them, so he joined Oswaldo Morocho Master Mix from the United States who created the first tracks.

Novillo is the first to record a song and the video clip produced in Cuenca whose name is "Dueño de la calle" with DJ Oswaldo Morocho and MC Blanco.

In 2004 he created the National Hip-hop Day that is celebrated every February 28, he also became a cultural manager organizing events so that the boys could express themselves in concerts that were held outdoors in the Broken Bridge.

At the end of the nineties, Juan Carlos Cancio Cangá, known in the hip-hop world as Yoni Peligro, arrived in Cuenca as a soccer player at the Cruz del Vado Club from Guayaquil, he is the first dance crew in Cuenca called Los Family Break.

Hiphoppas use public space, specifically in Parque Guatáná, in La Glorieta in Parque Calderón at night, on the steps of the Parque de La Madre sector, in Parque Miraflores, around the Benigno Malo school, in the Parque Iberia and on the steps of the Baños Parish.

### **Conclusions**

The hip-hop movement is a different form of expression, it is a contested collective, which manifests the rejection of an adverse situation, especially of the segregated youth who are grouped in crews as a sociocultural expression of denunciation, it is a collective that due to lack of resources It empowers or appropriates public spaces, therefore it is interpreted as a violent or conflictive culture.

Through their way of thinking they make their discomfort and dissatisfaction known for changes. They have their own distinctive, spiritual features, clothing, customs, materials and affective feelings, in addition to developing the liberation of creativity through their expressions such as painting in graffiti, music with the DJ, singing through the Rap of the

MC, and Break Dance and its particular way of life that breaks the stigma posed of the perception that people have about hip-hop culture.

In Cuenca there are so-called collectives or "crews" that are organized by people who manage and know all the elements of hip hop, these are grouped together for a single purpose and it is to express their passion for the genre.

The hip hop movement in Cuenca are located anywhere where the hoppers find ample space to function, the negative side is that many times these spaces are not legal for them to carry out their activities, so they must abandon them.

Although hip hop is a very young genre in Cuenca, there are currently several festivals in different areas of the city for hip hop, showing society its diversity.

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