

CULTURES of Participation: YOUNG PEOPLES' Perceptions and Practices of CITIZENSHIP



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Research Team

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Objectives and Research Questions

1

The objective of the research has been to gain an understanding of how young people from different backgrounds perceive and practice citizenship and public action and create and engage in their political world in the context of a socially and economically divided society. As such we have been concerned in finding out what the terms 'participation' and 'citizenship' actually mean to young people in their everyday lives and what bearing the category of class and region of habitation have upon these understandings.

Our research tackles these questions in a qualitative way, seeking to understand young people's engagement in the public sphere of the city of Rio de Janeiro and their cultures of participation.

Another important point in the research is to understand how the processes of participation of young people who are part of different projects, initiatives and movements unfold. How do young people connect themselves to these organizations or how are they recruited? Why do young people affiliate themselves to these collectives and what are the values associated with these? Does participation contribute to their personal development, to their 'empowerment'? What are the effects of participation and how are these experienced by young people in their day to day lives?

Fieldwork

Fieldwork took place in three stages:

1) Interviews were conducted with 24 coordinators and educators from various organizations in order to better understand their goals, practices and challenges as well as how young people participate in their projects. Here we chose 14 social movements and non-governmental organizations who work with young people in a perspective of social justice, citizenship and/or access to cultural opportunities. The aim was to have a range of organizations, initiatives and movements that represented the diversity of groups in which young people participate in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

A number of these initiatives work with young people, through cultural forms, such as music, dance, cinema, theatre, photography, as means of engaging them in a process of critical reflection, around citizenship and other topics, and as a means for personal and community development.

Also significant are the number of organizations that focus their actions on communication media such as radio, TV, cinema as well as the printed press. An important aspect of these initiatives involves a critical reflection of how the dominant mass media has represented young people and how it has excluded or stigmatized marginalized communities.

Another set of organizations and initiatives we interviewed demonstrate a project for social change that is more easily recognized as forms of political activism. This is especially the case with the MST, the Landless Movement.¹

¹ The Landless Movement is a large grass-roots movement present throughout Brazil, fighting for the rights of landless peasants. As well as their more visible direct-action occupation of unused lands, they are involved in a whole range of initiatives especially those around education and awareness raising in cities and rural areas. The Movement is said to have around 300,000 families, and as such a considerable number of young people. Many of these young people come to take leadership positions in local groups, and increasingly also on a national level.



2) In a second stage of the research, we conducted nine focus group interviews with a total of 59 young people who were participating in these initiatives, projects, social movements, or other ‘spaces of participation’, between the ages of 16 and 24, with a few exceptions. We always sought to groups that were representative in terms of gender, ethnicity and social class, although concerning this last category, with the exception of the student movement, we noted that few initiatives directly targeted or sought to include middle class youth. During this stage we sought to understand how young people actually participate in specific projects, as well as the meaning and impact they attach to such participation. Besides the participation in ‘projects’ we also sought to understand what young people participate in more broadly and what they consider participation to be.

3) Based on our experiences with these groups we conducted a third stage of the research, in which we deepened our understanding of the trajectories of participation based on the experiences of 12 individuals, seeking the more subtle meanings and effects of their engagement with citizenship. To do this we used a ‘life histories’ and participatory approach, with individual interviews, group debates, and texts written by this group of young people themselves with the goal of reflecting on their experiences and these discussions. As a product of this third phase, we have created a joint publication with a group of seven young people entitled *Nós: the revolution of the day to day*.

Visions of Youth

2

Organizations who work with youth always have a particular vision of what is ‘youth’. Are young people seen as subjects of rights who should have their subjectivity, potential,

capacity to act and choose respected, or are they seen as potential risks who should be rescued from idleness, before becoming involved in drug dealing and dangerous activities. Are young people seen as in the process of becoming

subjects, as a hope for the future of the country, or as individuals who should be valued in the present, with their own culture, forms of expression and aspirations? It is important to note that the vision an organization has concerning this group reflects its values, goals and its idea of citizenship.

Another important perspective is that of young people themselves: how does s/he understand this moment in their lives. In our research we could observe three recurring narratives about youth amongst those we interviewed.

1) Risk

Some of those interviewed point out that many organizations who work with young people from working class backgrounds depart from a perspective of risk and discipline. This can be seen not only in 'assistentialist' organizations who work in the favelas but also in the discourse in the mass media and in government agencies as well as in a number of research projects and academic publications. A number of these projects and initiatives, though progressive in many ways, maintain a view that impoverished youths need "culture, leisure, sport" not because they are citizens like everyone else, but to prevent them entering a life of crime and violence.

In this way impoverished youths are seen as a specific case of potential risk and not as subjects who should have their rights and access to these resources guaranteed.

Today, a mistaken perspective is given of the work which the NGOs carry out that whoever is taking part in these cultural projects and are helped, are being diverted from joining the drug gangs and criminality, which I think is completely wrong. In my case I am doing photography, if I wasn't in this NGO would I be in the drug gang? I don't think that is right, it's just not true, there are many cases, obviously, but it is not generally

true. The person who is doing theatre: ah, she is in this cultural group, but she could be dealing, killing, stealing, but no, she is doing art. It's not true. The fact that you live in a community [a favela] does not mean that you have only one option: drug dealing.
[Young woman from the project Jornal Juvenil Brasil]

The vision of youth as a risk reinforces stereotypes and a fragmented perspective of citizenship where an expectation of equal rights for all does not exist. This perspective favours preventive actions in which individuals are treated as potential risks for those outside the favela. This attitude continues to influence the discourses and practices of educators, policymakers, multilateral institutions and funders of social projects.

2) Experimentation

In our research we found that some organizations, rather than adopting a perspective of risk, develop their activities in the fields of the arts, culture and in communication media departing from the view of amplifying the possibilities of experimentation for young people. In this way they seek to give opportunities to young people who would not otherwise have had access to experiences in the fields of music, dance, photography and video production. These initiatives do not necessarily have the goal of vocational training, but, as one coordinator interviewed points out, "there is the goal of increasing the possibilities for people". In this way the effect of such participation is not necessarily immediate but allows for the "broadening of horizons".

There is a change from the person who left school and had a chance to experiment a lot of things, and who decides that computers weren't for him, music wasn't for

him, art was not what he wanted, nor cinema. Or, from cinema, he sees that he wants to do Law and begins to Have a chance to dream, understand? So this thing about opening up perspectives is cool, because if you see a lot of things, your perspective opens up. You see that it is not only that which you can or cannot be. So if we can guarantee a little of this opening up of perspective, I think we can... I think we have achieved a lot, you know.

[Coordinator Nós do Cinema]

The emphasis here is on the equality of opportunity. This being not necessarily related to vocational training but rather to the possibility of experiencing different forms of expression and of being in the world.

3) *Revolution and Social Transformation*

We could note that some organizations see young people as revolutionaries and responsible for social change.² In this way there is a great expectation about the role of youth as a catalyst of social change. This vision was seen amongst young people as well as with adults. In movements like the Landless Movement (MST), such a perspective is most clearly present. As one youngster from the movement puts it, youths are seen as the sector of the society who are least conservative and who have the greatest potential for transformation.

² We believe that most projects do have the goal of social transformation. But some initiatives have a perspective of intervening more directly on the macro-political level, or as we have termed it here, in more formal political arenas.

There is a phrase, which I have been reading these days about youth, and there is a Russian theologian and she says that power is white, power is adult and male. That is, only man has the opportunity to have power, and the young and the black do not. I mean, I think that is a bit limiting, and she also says that youth have fewer vices, as those who have power absorb vices and as the young do not have power they have fewer vices. There is another [phrase] by Mao Tse Tung who says that youth have the most desire to learn and are the least conservative in thought. In truth, I see transformation coming from young people, you know,

[Youth, MST]

In this perspective on youth, citizenship appears more strongly connected with a vision of an alternative society, where traditional power structures are transformed.



What is participation?

3

The Oxford English Dictionary defines participation as “the action or fact of partaking, having or forming a part of” (in Rahnema 1992).³ As Majid Rahnema (1992) rightly points out, participation could then be either oriented towards a goal, or involved in a process without a predefined purpose. It could also be positive or negative, depending on the particular goal it is engaged in fulfilling, an issue not often addressed in the participation literature.

Participation is also dependent on motivations: it can be free and spontaneous, manipulative or forced. Participation then also depends on the degree of consciousness of those taking part: some forms of participation could be directed without the awareness of the participant, where actors do not feel forced into partaking of something but are inspired to enact or directed by centers outside their control.

The important point is to be clear about the object of participation – participate in what? In our research we tried to leave this ‘what’ as open as possible, yet somehow connected to actions, initiatives, organizations and projects around the public sphere, and more specifically a space of the public sphere concerned with the themes of citizenship and social justice. It is interesting to note that even when this ‘what’ is not defined, the word nevertheless assumes a positive connotation when used by researchers,

NGO workers, government employees and the young people we interviewed. Participation, always appears as a good thing.

Although what is considered ‘participation’ for those interviewed may change from project to project, from person to person, we could note a few points in common. Below are some examples of the questions “what is participation?”

Firstly it is to have a voice. Because in whatever meeting you may find yourself in, there will be people who are older than you, but at that moment you will have a voice. When you speak people will listen, analyze what you are saying and never think that it is nonsense. The first thing is to have a voice anywhere, in whatever space.
[Young People – Bases Santa Marta]

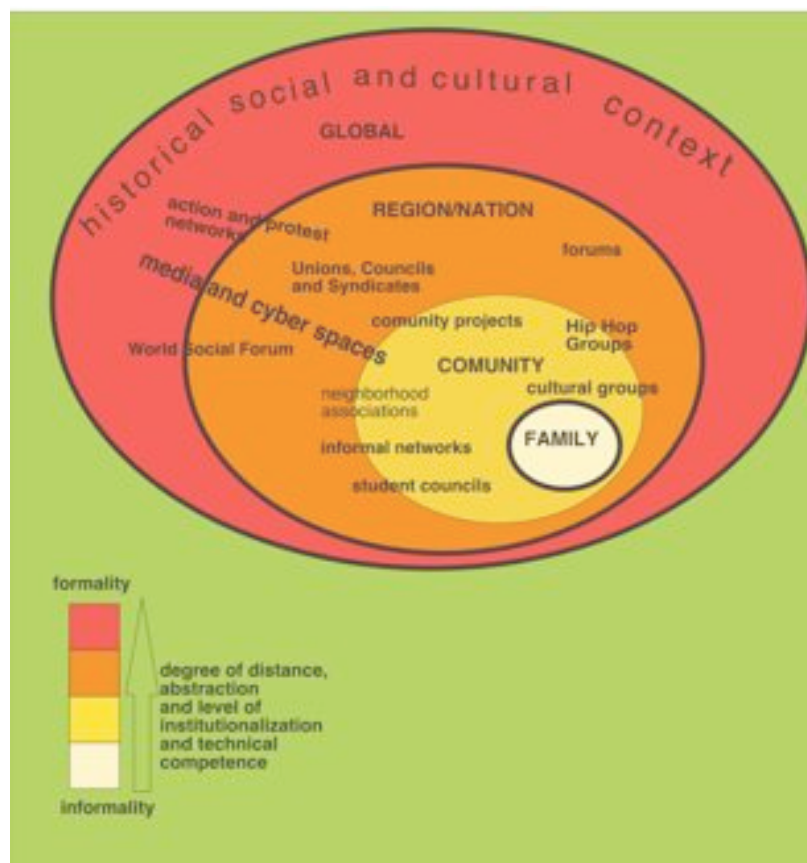
Yeah... it has something to do with being involved, not only with people, but also with the ideas of the group, of thinking about things to achieve with these groups. I think that is how you participate. Participation has something to do with action. Of you doing something together with that group, not just being there physically at that moment (...) Participation for me has to do with participating with being involved in something.
[Young person - Escola Crítica de Comunicação]

³ Rahnema, Majid. (1992) ‘Participation’ in Sachs, Wolfgang (ed.) *The development dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power*. London: Zed Books.

We identified four key dimensions of participation: *context; movement; power; and effects.*

1) Context The historical, social and cultural context offers different opportunities, spaces and forms of participation. The geographical context of participation is important (whether it be at a community level, at school, social movement, national or international); as well as its degree of institutionalization, that is, whether it takes place in an NGO, or in a Hip Hop group, in a student council, a Youth Parliament or even a World Social Forum.

The context of participation (opposite figure) incorporates the different ecological levels: family, community, region/nation and global. In order to operate within the system certain kinds of competency are required (such as positioning oneself before a group, listening, acting, etc.) whereas the further from the initial nuclear family and community level, the more complex and institutionalized the dynamics of participation become. Despite this, informality can permeate throughout the system, always existing in tension: between a politics of the day to day, which is more immediate, or in terms of cultural forms of resistance, and an institutionalization of more rigid forms.



What is the historical, social and cultural context of youth participation in the public sphere?

- Today the forms and spaces of young people's participation in the public sphere, as well as how the 'political' is understood, differs from the decades before the end of the Cold War.

- For many authors, journalists and politicians, the youth of today are

considered consumerists, individualistic and apathetic, contrary to the youth of the 1960s, for instance, who were at the vanguard of social transformations.

- Such a perspective hides a generalised disillusionment with the political class and its traditional institutions, the ideological shifts that have occurred in the post-Cold War period, as well as the possibility of seeing new spaces (for example the Internet or the World Social Forum), forms (social movements, cultural groups, Hip Hop activism), and themes (ecology, citizenship, free-software, alter-globalisation) in which young people are key players.

- At the same time, the young people who today participate in such initiatives do not have the same profile as the youth activists of the 1960s, who were, to a large extent, middle-class students.⁴

- Equally the young people of today, from the middle-class as well as from working-class backgrounds, differ from those of previous generations because of the particular social, cultural and economic context in which they are found. Here we point to two main points:

a) A new culture of work, an insecurity in the labour market and new pressures to become inserted into it. Whilst for some this may mean that energies that might have gone into activism in the past are channeled into time spent preparing for the job-market or for the university entrance exam, for others entry into the voluntary sector as project participants is seen as a possible route into employment.

b) the emergence of new forms of 'political' action through the New Social Movements, (feminism, ecology, ethnic minority rights, sexual diversity), *and forms of cultural resistance*, what we have here termed a new D.I.Y (do it yourself) culture. A number of the initiatives we identified work with young people, through cultural forms, such as music, dance, cinema, theatre, photography, as means of engaging young people in a process of critical reflection, around citizenship and other topics, and as a means for personal and community development. In this, we identified a genealogy in the non-governmental sector of an alternative pedagogy that is the legacy of the Movement for Popular Education, part of the revolutionary movements throughout Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s and closely tied to Liberation Theology.

2) The movement: this includes; the motivations which induce people to participate (such as solidarity, indignation, the desire to learn), how this mobilisation occurs (the identification with the group, the struggle for rights and resources, through a provocation of outside agents), and the resources that are available in order to participate (such as time, experience and opportunities).

The three key ingredients of participation:⁵

a) Motivation – Answers the question: why do young people participate? We found a spectrum of motivations and incentives: from the financial represented by the grant that the youngster receives whilst frequenting some projects; to the incentive for personal growth such as through training, the possibility of entering the labour market; to the curiosity or desire to learn about certain activities. Also important is the motivation that emerges through indignation and the desire for change, though also evident were some 'accidental' entries into initiatives, where no clear motivation was identified.

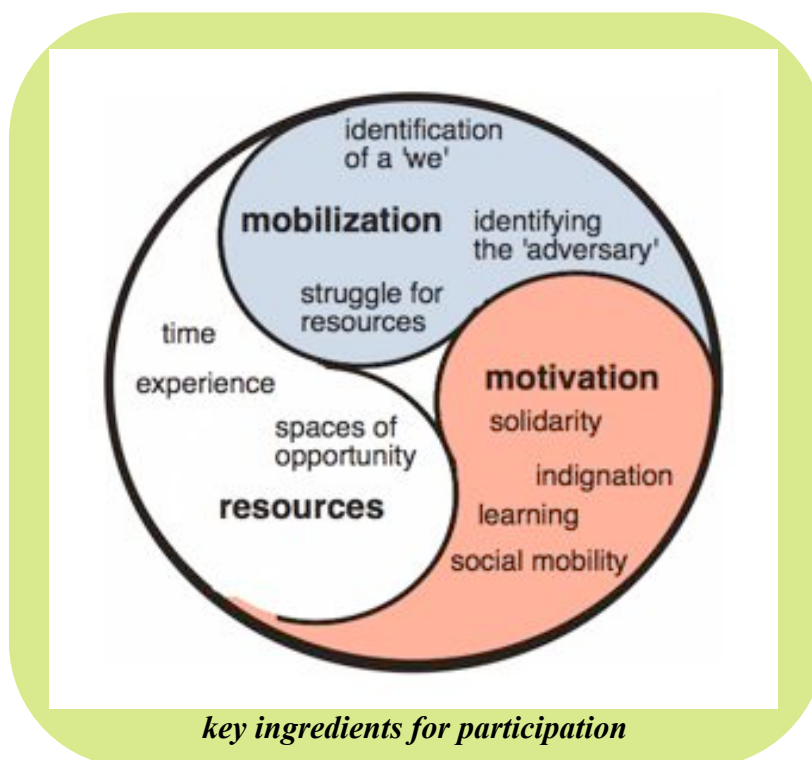
b) Resources – Answers the question: what are the conditions for this to happen? Here the important aspects are time, money, the pressures of the labour market, as well as personal abilities and self-esteem.

c) Mobilization – Answers the question: what are the local conditions that provoke

⁴ Though here we must consider the possibility that many of the struggles in which working-class youth participated in historically have not been chronicled or studies to the same extent as the more visible student activities (we thank Alexandre Soares for this observation).

⁵ See Simmons, Richard & Birchall, Johnston (2005) 'A Joined-up Approach to User Participation in Public Services: Strengthening the "Participation Chain".' *Social Policy & Administration*. Vol.39, No.3, pp260-283.

the individual to act in collective spaces to effect change? Is there a negative relation to authority (that is, a cause or indignation), the feeling of a lack, the desire for change? Important here is the presence of opportunities to effect change.



3) Power: we understand that every participation involves power relations which have to do with the dynamics and spaces of participation, with who has access to these spaces, as well with how some forms of participation come to be considered legitimate whilst others are not, or are ignored.

Power: participative processes are marked by relations of power. Individuals differ according the degree of ability and confidence in positioning themselves in certain situations involving a group. Further, individuals are affected by power relations that originate beyond the context of the group, that is, through social and historical constructions of people from different classes, ethnicity, gender and generation

These differences, personal as well as social, mean that the dynamics of participation are rarely egalitarian. Even though the ideal of a horizontal relationship of participation, without differences in power, is distant from the majority of situations, some initiatives we encountered strive to achieve this. On the other hand, we noted a number of initiatives said to be “participative” seeking the inclusion of young people in their activities, which did not have a reflection about such power imbalances. In some cases, we could observe the reproduction of power relations where the older generation ends up controlling the processes of participation, imposing its ideas and values. In such cases, there was a lack of “dialogue” and “listening”, as well as of a pedagogy that sought the progressive inclusion of young people in the participative process.

As one of the supervisors of the Universidade Popular, an initiative seeking to help those from disadvantaged backgrounds to go into university, who is sensitive to such dynamics, put it:

So there are some people that have a more erratic participation, there are some who are those who are always there, who you know you will see... and this in a way impoverishes our discussions, you end up creating more crystalized power relations inside the group, so that the people who participate more, end up having more of a say, their words have more weight which is something that we deal with, though it is kind of inevitable and very complicated. Because, I don't know, when you say something the people listen to you because it was you who said it. When someone else says the same thing he is not heard in the same way. Or sometimes you end up imposing your will, even if this is not what you want, because your arguments have more weight for others. You are treading on egg shells.

[Supervisor Universidade Popular]

Participative processes are marked by relations of power.

It was interesting to note the conflicts created when young people organised themselves and began to enter the political spaces controlled by adults. This was related to us by young people from the MST through their attempt at organising a youth sector within the movement. Similarly, in the project Bases de Apoio, a community project for young people from an urban shanty (*favela*), when they became more involved in the neighbourhood association meetings and realised that their opinions were not being considered because of their age:

In truth what happened is that young people had a great role in the community [*favela*] some years back. A really important role, because in those days there was the whole question of the forced removal of the communities. So the youth in those days rebelled against this... The youth of the period lit itself up in such a way that they took over the leadership here. Today those who manifested in those days are community leaders. And all of this process from then until now, from the 1980s to now, there hasn't been any other youth leadership, only adults these days youth no longer stands up.

- I think very often it is because of a lack of space, there was no way of doing it, they went into the institutions

and did not have the power to participate (...) Even to position yourself... And we were resisted, for us to become community leaders, it was difficult. We had to climb on the table, bang our fists, shout "I am here!"

- I am young, we can work.

[Young people – Projeto Bases de Apoio]

Cities like Rio de Janeiro, marked as they are by deep social divisions, pose particular challenges for collective action and for the practice and struggle for citizenship. This social relationship between differing socio-economic groups is often termed *Cidade Partida*, The Divided City, by Rio's residents. It points to the relation between the *favela x asfalto*, the shantytown and the asphalt, or the semi-legal domains and the regular spaces of the city, coming to represent in the imaginary of scholars, politicians, the media and other inhabitants, the lack of integration in the city.

The term *Divided City* refers to a scission that separates the 'formal' city, with its streets and properties juridically legitimized and with a range of public services, from the 'informal' city.

The notion of the *Divided City* is further accentuated by the dominant media which installs and reproduces prejudiced

representations of these places. Many people interviewed in our research, especially young people and co-coordinators of initiatives that worked with media and communication, related similar feelings. From their perspectives, the *favelas*, and consequently its inhabitants, were often described in the media in prejudiced ways. The *favela* is commonly described in terms of its lacks – of the law, of resources, of culture, of productive power, or even, in more extreme cases, of morality.

In this respect it is significant the number of organisations that focus their actions on the means of communication such as radio, TV, cinema as well as the printed press. An important aspect of these initiatives involves a critical

reflection of how the traditional mass media has represented young people and how it has excluded or stigmatised marginalised communities. Through most of these projects there is a concern in creating images, stories, representations that are normally not seen in the traditional mass media about these spaces and this misrepresented population. The focus of these initiatives is then a critical analysis of the media, as well as providing access to the tools and techniques for producing new representations. This process of critique and re-representation allows for an engagement with many questions around citizenship, the history of excluded communities, as well as opening up possible life-projects through these fields.



Rio seen from the top of Favela St Marta –photo by Karen Ward

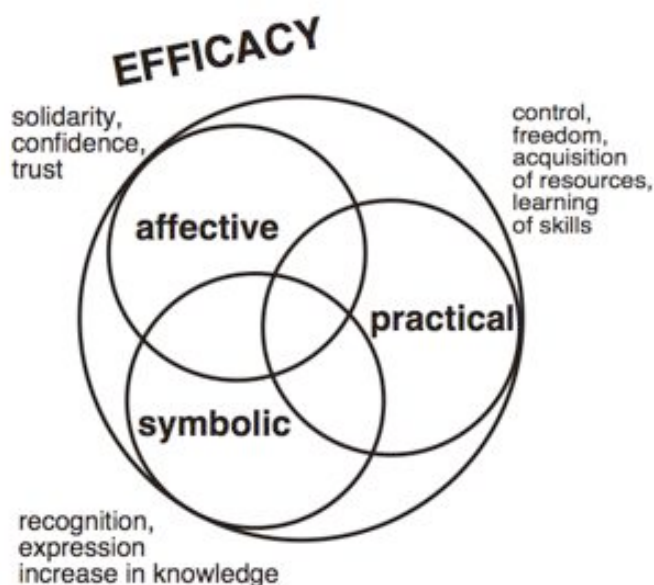
4) Effects: we understand that participating produces practical effects (like a greater sense of control or freedom, increasing access to resources or developed capacities); symbolic effects (such as recognition from others, the expression of values, an increase in knowledge); as well as affective effects (such as solidarity, confidence and self-esteem).

Bordenave (1995) defines participation as the way through which humans fulfill and affirm themselves, make things and dominate nature and the world. For the author the practice of participation:

involves other necessities that are no less important such as the interaction with others, self-expression, the development of reflexive thought, the pleasure in creating and re-creating things, and, further, to value oneself and be valued by others. In conclusion, participation has two complementary bases: an affective one, we participate because we feel pleasure in doing things with others – and an instrumental base – we participate because doing things with others is more effective and efficient than doing them by ourselves [*my translation*] (Bordenave, 1995, p.16).

According to the author there are two keys aspects of participation: its instrumental side and its affective (and we would add symbolic) side, themes that were very evident in our conversations with young people we came to know throughout this research. As such, the affective aspect of participation though crucial, is a much neglected theme in writings and research on the topic.

This was seen in our research where one of the most important aspects young people spoke of as regards their participation in projects and organisations related to affective and symbolic themes: the possibility of meeting exchanging with and getting to know other young people, of feeling a sense of solidarity, feeling valued and a sense of belonging.



This distinction of the utilitarian and affective/symbolic aspects of participation is important, but should not be taken in an absolute way, as a participation initially conceived as utilitarian can develop affective processes. Similarly, the creation of feelings of solidarity and belonging, of 'empowerment' are also commonly connected to struggles for rights, the creation of collective forms of cultural expression, etc.

a) Self-esteem

A common theme amongst a number of initiatives that work with young people is the concept of self-esteem. This is described as the feeling of recognition, confidence, of being respected and valued by others, of being capable of carrying out certain actions and activities, of relating to others in a gratifying way. It seems to us that self-esteem is closely linked to participation, in as much as the more confident the individual feels, the greater the tendency that s/he will actively participate in a group. This is clearly seen in the exchange below, amongst a group of young people who were part of a radio project, which followed the question as to the effects of participation on their lives:

Before I was reluctant to say I live in the Complexo da Maré [a large favela]. The person jolts, the person retreats, it is horrible, you have to own up, I always own up, you know, about the place where you live and it doesn't matter, the place doesn't make you up, it is you who makes up the place.

- My critical gaze shifted.

- Yes, our vision of society amplified, and we cannot deny our roots, I think that is it. Many people who live in the community are ashamed of saying that they live in a community, that they live in a *favela*.

- They feel shame.

- Afterwards I started having this other perspective; I gave more emphasis to

the fact of the place where I live, to my origins, to the fact of being black too.
[Young people - Jornal Juvenil Brasil]

The conversation is emblematic of a common response given by many young people who were part of a number of initiatives we came to know. Such transformations are variously described as having to do with a sense of 'self-esteem', of not feeling ashamed to be considered as belonging to a particular group or category, but rather, a renewed sense of pride at being part of a constituency with a particular history and culture. As such the individual may come to identify with their particular 'community', 'race', sexual orientation or class. In a society marked by inequality, social segregation, racism and machismo, this is no mean feat.

b) New visibility

Another significant theme, which is here termed 'new visibility', related to the way in which many projects were involved in a project or re-representing groups that have been historically marginalised and misrepresented – young *favela* residents, young black men and women. As mentioned, it is significant to note how many initiatives working with marginalized populations have come to use cultural forms and different media as tools in this process of re-representation.

c) Solidarity

Solidarity was one of the most important values mentioned by young people and co-coordinators when asked about what for them was the key thing about participation. Solidarity, was also spoken of as an antidote to the growing tendency towards individualism in contemporary consumer society.

An interesting aspect seen in the trajectories of some of those we interviewed is the potential of groups to

transform the subject's identity from a more restricted sphere of individual and immediate concerns to a more expansive conception of the self connected to a feeling for the common good. On some occasions such transformation can be profound, affecting the way the individual thinks, relates to others and sees her/his place in the world.

Concluding

As we noted here, participation always occurs within a historical context that offers different opportunities, forms and themes that come to provoke it. At the same time, each historical period offers challenges to participation, some more explicitly than others, as seen in years of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). The “presentification” (or “immediatism”), that are considered by many to be features of the contemporary world, in a culture that values immediate gratification through consumption, also imposes challenges for the participation in projects that envision a collectively created future. As pointed out here, for many researchers, and in the common sense view, the youth of today are more individualistic and apathetic than those in the past.

In this research we have attempted to problematize such simplistic view. Yes, advanced capitalism and the diffusion of a consumer and individualistic culture offer a great challenge for all generations. Regarding the younger generation a “new work culture” produces new anxieties and pressures that may restrict the possibilities for participation. But at the same time, we noted the importance of not only seeing participation as occurring in ‘formal’ spaces and practices. As we noted here, there are new ways of thinking about the political, such as through the New Social Movements that focus on feminism, sexual diversity, ecology, the fight for land; as well as new forms of cultural resistance, with Hip Hop

in Brazil being a strong gathering point for young people in the pursuit of social change.⁶ These reconceptualisations of the play of power and counter-power turn our gaze also towards the micro processes and initiatives in which young people also participate in.

Equally we noted that implicitly or explicitly all projects, initiatives or social movements depart from a certain conception of citizenship. But, as we identified, there are different notions about what this entails, each reflecting a particular idea about youth. In this way it is always important to ask “participate for what?”, “empower for what?”. So that young people are able to engage with the labour market? So that the young person does not become involved in drug trafficking? In order for her/him to experiment, and discover her/his potential? For her/him to be critical and community spirited, capable of provoking social change?

What we identified as the ‘stigmatising’ or fragmented view of youth, was clearly perceived as such by a number of young people we talked to who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of such projects but who clearly resented these representations. Projects with this set of views were not the ones that we tended to concentrate our observations on as regards the practice of young people’s involvement in them. Rather, we tended to focus on the later two possibilities that we have here classified as those initiatives that

⁶ Hip Hop culture cannot be termed a movement as such, as there are many different trends and leanings, from the more progressive groups to groups that praise criminal factions, to religious Hip hop, homophobic Hip Hop, party political Hip Hop, Hip Hop of the right. Yet even with all this diversity, there is in Brazil a strong tendency towards organizing around the theme of social justice, against discrimination, violence, inequality and racism. These organisations go from local initiatives to national networks. In our research we could see a strong connection between Hip Hop and the most well-known social movements – such as the Feminist Movement and the MST.

offer young people opportunities for experimentation and those that see them as potential catalysts for social change.

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that participation or projects said to be participative, may also reproduce power relations, across age, class and gender differences. For instance in the way in which young people are seen by different initiatives, the ways in which they are mobilised, whether they participate in the planning and managing of the project, whether they are part of its creation. We do not wish to impose a model of participation, as we do not think such a model can exist. But we do believe, with Bordenave (2004), that participation “can be learned and perfected through practice and reflection”.

As the author states: “It seems that one only learns to participate, participating” (Bordenave, 2004, p.74).

The quality of participation increases when people learn to know their reality; to reflect; to overcome real or apparent contradictions; to anticipate consequences; understand new meanings of words; to distinguish causes from effects, observations from inferences, facts from judgements. The quality of participation also increases when people learn how to manage conflicts; clarify feelings and behaviours; tolerate differences; respect opinions; postpone gratification. The quality is incremented when people learn how to organise and co-ordinate meetings, assemblies, work groups; to research problems; elaborate reports; use the means and techniques of communication [my translation] (Bordenave, 2004, p.73).⁷

These aspects of participation are crucial. Here we add others that we encountered in our research. The quality of participation increases when people feel valued, when their effort and actions are recognised, when they feel capable of doing, of transforming the world and the social relations that surround them. The quality also increases when people feel their participation and the objectives and values of the collectives in which they participate as being full of meaning, as profoundly gratifying.

CIESPI – International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood, In partnership with PUC-Rio.

CIESPI is a research and reference center dedicated to the development of research and social projects for children and youth and their links with family and community. The center has a goal of influencing policy and practice to this population, contributing to their wholesome development and promoting their rights. www.ciespi.org.br

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Economic and Social Research Council (UK) through the Research Programme Non-Governmental and Public Action

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/NGPA/>



⁷ Bordenave, Juan. (2004) *O que é participação?* Ed. Brasiliense, São Paulo.