NGPA Working Paper Series

Non-Governmental Public Action Programme

6

Cultures of Participation: Young people's engagement in the public sphere in Brazil

Udi Mandel Butler
Marcelo Princeswal

LSE

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

General introduction to NGPA Working Papers

The **NGPA Working Paper** (**NGPAWP**) series provides a vehicle for disseminating recent and ongoing research of researchers based at, or linked to the Non-Governmental Public Action Programme (NGPA). It aims to reflect the range and diversity of non-governmental public action, and understand the impact of public action.

Researchers on the Non-Governmental Public Action research programme work with advocacy networks, peace groups, campaigns and coalitions, trade unions, peace-building groups, rights-based groups, social movements and faith-based groups to understand the impact of non-governmental public action. They are based in universities, think-tanks, civil society organizations, projects and networks around the world gathering data, building theory, and strengthening co-operation between researchers and practitioners.

For further information of the work of the programme and details of its publications see:

www.lse.ac.uk/ngpa

The London School of Economics and Political Science is a School of the University of London. It is a charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the companies Acts (registered number 70527)

Contents

Introduction

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a growing interest in research and social programs – implemented by the state as well as the non-governmental sector – concerning the participation of children and youth in the public sphere (Flekkoy and Kaufman 1997, UNICEF 2003). An important landmark in this process was the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child of 1989, followed by various initiatives based on a rights discourse, in a number of fields: against child labour, domestic violence, children living on the streets, amongst many others. The Convention of the Rights of the Child has a number of articles specifically addressing the right of the child and adolescent to be consulted over issues that concern them.

Prompted by these shifts, debates are occurring in many parts of the world concerning young people's rights to participation. In 'Northern' countries, like the UK and US, amongst others, the themes of child and youth participation is often linked to the notion of 'civic participation' and the participation in 'formal' political spaces like school councils and municipal forums (Coles 1995, Flekkoy & Kaufman 1997, UNICEF 2003). In 'Southern' countries, on top of these spaces, social development projects as implemented by multilateral agencies and a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies have also focused on the theme of child and youth participation. Such projects offer another space of participation which has to do with the involvement of recipient groups and communities in the process of planning and implementation of particular projects. Following this movement demanding the participation of children and young people in various sectors of society, there has been an emerging critique of the use and abuse of terms such as 'participation' and 'empowerment' particularly as found within the international development sector. Here we seek to critically engage with these debates analysing more precisely how these terms are understood and practised 'in the field' (Cooke, & Kothari *et al*, 2004, Rahnema 1992).

Our research tackles these questions in a qualitative way, seeking to understand young people's engagement in the public sphere[1] of the city of Rio de Janeiro and what we here term their 'cultures of participation'. This research examines some of the initiatives in

---

[1] Taking the definition from the Non-Governmental and Public Action Programme, we understand the public sphere as the space of collective action, outside the family, towards public or private goals.

which young people today participate: community organisations, cultural groups, social movements and the historical processes that help us understand their current configuration.

At the same time in which we note a shift in discourse and practices that advocate the participation of children and youth in a number of social institutions and spaces, we also believe that the traditional forms of political participation, in particular in the current generation of young people, have undergone a significant transformation. For many commentators this transformation is marked by the apparent apathy of young people today as regards politics and collective participation for social change.

Yet, as researchers point out (Novaes and Vital 2006, Balardini, 2005, Pais 2000, Abramo, 2005) young people today are involved in spaces of participation that are different from the traditional forms of political engagement and tackle themes which are different from those of previous generations. The present article maps out some of these shifts in the sphere of public action in the context of Rio de Janeiro.

This research took place in Rio de Janeiro, internationally renowned for its beauty as well as its inequality. Rio was chosen precisely because of this context – of a 'divided city'[2], in order to access whether young people's political imaginations and participation are differently configured as a consequence of being located in different regions of the city and in different categories of class.

At the same time as Rio is known for its inequality, it also possesses a flourishing civil society sector, with non-governmental and community organisations seeking to combat poverty, discrimination and urban violence and whose practices have also become well known, nationally and internationally.

Initially our team identified a number of organisations from which 20 were contacted, and 16 chosen to take part in our study. This sample included social movements and non-governmental organisations who work with young people from a perspective of social justice, citizenship and/or access to cultural opportunities. The aim was to have a range of organisations, initiatives and movements that represented the diversity of groups in

---

[2] Term coined by Brazilian journalist and writer Zuanir Ventura (2002 [1994]).

which young people participate in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

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 focus groups that were representative in terms of gender, ethnicity and social class. Though significantly we noted that with the exception of the student movement and hip hop collectives, initiatives working with youth appear to focus on young people who come from lower income groups and especially those living in the urban shanties or *favelas.*

During the two phases described above, we counted on the participation of around 100 people, including co-ordinators and young people.[3] Our objective consisted of trying to better 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. In this way we sought to problematise an understanding of participation, often found in social projects targeting young people, that is too narrowly defined and related to formal institutions. Instead we sought where else participation may be found.

Though our perspective from the beginning sought other forms of participation practised by young people, we noted that both our gaze, as well as that of the young people we interviewed, often departed from a 'formal' perspective of participation – the social project, the cultural group, the NGO, the social movement. In this way we point to a limitation of our methodology in approaching only young people who were already part of well-defined and recognised collectives. A more complex exercise would be to engage with young people who do not necessarily fit such a profile (who are in fact the majority) to better understand their forms and spaces of participation, such as engaging in one-off actions like organising events, taking part in demonstrations, giving donations, amongst others. This is a challenge that is part of a greater project, which is, that of understanding the 'political' in the present day where, as the New Social Movements literature points out, "the personal is political".

---

[3] On top of these, we also conducted 12 further interviews with young people to gain a more in-depth understanding of their trajectories of participation.

The context of participation

Juan Bordenave, a Paraguaian writer influenced by Brazilian philosopher, pedagogue and activist, Paulo Freire, has helped us clarify the concept of participation. Bordenave (1995) analyses the different forms of participation in society as well as the varying quality and degree in which it manifests itself. Regarding its form, the author distinguishes between micro and macro participation, identifying many levels or spaces: the primary space of the family, of friends and the neighbourhood; a secondary level, such as professional or neighbourhood associations, unions, businesses; and a tertiary level, like political parties, social class movements and so on.

Bordenave considers micro-participation as the "voluntary association of two or more people in a common activity whose aim is not only for personal and immediate benefit" (Bordenave, 2004 p25). On the other hand, macro-participation is defined as the "intervention of people in the dynamic processes which constitute or modify society, that is, the history of society" (Ibid.).

In this way the author points to a more restricted and immediate participation in contrast to a vision of social transformation or a form of participation involved in the identification of the broad struggles of the times around politics and economics, revolving primarily around social class. The latter is termed social participation, being not only the sum of various participation in associations, but something qualitatively different. For Bordenave macro-participation acts on that which is most basic in society – the production of material and cultural goods, as well as the administrations and use of these goods.

Bordenave's definition is based on the analysis of historical materialism – of structure and superstructure or, in our case, of micro and macro-participation, though the two sets of terms are by no means homologous. Behind this perspective we also find an understanding of 'doing politics' that restricts itself to traditional organisations like parties, unions, neighbourhood associations and so on. Such a perspective is also found in discourse around children and youth participation. In this way the view goes that children and youth become ever more embedded within formal institutions (student councils and unions, etc.) through which (s)he becomes a citizen capable of navigating in the political waters of society. This idea of politics and the political has been critiqued by a number of authors (such as Laclau & Mouffe 1983, Foucault, 1991, Guattari, & Rolnik, 2005) who

situate micro-politics as intrinsically connected to social transformation – which seems to us different from Bordenave's analysis – moving away from Marxist notions of structure.

For these authors, there is no transformation which does not simultaneously affect the power structures that Bordenave (1995) calls restrictive and immediate (family, neighbourhood, etc.). The critiques of Marxist structuralism are very present in the new forms of political movements known as the "New Social Movements". Here political struggle is not necessarily a class struggle, but a struggle of specific groups for their rights, gathering around particular identities for instance; being black, women, homosexuals.

To illustrate this issue of identity, or rather, identification, as the ultimate site of politics the following quote from a research participant in Rio provides an indication of a process or experience that qualifies for what Guattari (1996) has termed micro-revolution. One of the questions during this research was what changed in young people's lives as a consequence of their participation in a range of organisations and initiatives concerned with issues of citizenship and social justice. This is what a young woman, who was taking part in a youth media project had to say:

> "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. Many people who live in the community are ashamed of saying that they live in a community, that they live in a *favela*. 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".

The statement is emblematic of a common response given by many young people, who were part of a number of initiatives we came to know. This micro-revolution can be described as one of *identification* with the individual's own 'community', 'race' or 'ethnicity', sexual orientation, and even class. The consequences of this 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. In a society marked by inequality, social segregation, racism and machismo, this is no mean feat. Yet, though a large step, and one which only a relatively few take, this initial micro-

revolution is crucial one for many young people, and an important consequence of their engagement in public action.

Historical Processes

As we mentioned in the introduction, over the last few years, we can perceive a shift in the discourses/practices which seek the increasing participation of children and youth in the public sphere and in the process of social development. At the same time, there have been significant changes regarding the participation of young people in the traditional forms of political organisation. For many researchers, and in a common sense view, this transformation is often understood as an apathy of youth regarding politics and collective participation for social change.

The young people of today, according to this perspective are: consumerist (passive before a consumer society); individualist (involved in individual projects and not those of solidarity); conservative (and not progressive); alienated (and not engaged); and apathetic (not participative) (Novaes, 2006). Is such a perspective correct? Is it fair to compare historically distinct generations? What is the basis for such comparison? What is the conception of politics which is used as a backdrop for this?

As many researchers have pointed out, young people today are involved in different spaces of participation, distinct from the traditional forms of political engagement. Beyond this, they act through different forms of organisation and address different issues to previous generations (Novaes 2006, Balardini, 2005, Pais 2000, Abramo, 2005). The development of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, have created new spaces and opportunities for participation and exchange. On the Internet the number of users and services available grows daily. This process brings with it profound changes in communication and in the circulation of information. For instance, the social networking sites (in the UK and US this being Facebook and MySpace, whereas in Brazil the service is called Orkut) offers novel possibilities for affiliating to communities and interest groups, to engage in debates and in some cases, concrete actions, that are initiated online.

Tracing the history of youth participation from what we have termed its 'formal' manifestation in traditional forms of political militancy, such as the student movements, or youth wings of political parties, towards new forms of participation centred in civil society (and especially amongst non-governmental organisations), we can suggest some important ways of accounting for this shift.

Sergio Balardini (2005) historically contextualises the great happenings of the decades of the 1960s and 1970s that produced significant changes in the political participation of young people all over the world, including in Brazil. In these decades we note a strong political and ideological polarisation that impacted the whole world: socialism and capitalism; the anti-colonial and national liberation movements occurring in many countries such as Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique. (Balardini, 2005).

This political radicalisation, Balardini points out, became present in many other contexts in the struggle against authoritarianism and injustice: inside the family; in school; at work; and in political life in general. The events of 1968, especially in France and the USA, but with repercussions in other countries, became a symbol of the effervescence of youth for radical social transformation.

The author argues that the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were the years in which the idea of changing the world constituted a part of being young, as he writes; "We were sure that everything was possible" (Balardini, 2005, p.100). This perspective suffers a radical shift from the 1980s and 1990s, as politics as the place for transforming the world begins to be subverted by the economy and transformed into a technique of management. Social relations, such as poverty and inequality, aggravate. In this way, Balardini refers to the present where society and culture celebrate the immediate, in what he terms a narcissist culture.

When we refer more specifically to the changes in youth participation in Brazil, it becomes necessary to examine the political, economic, social, cultural and consequently subjective transformations that have impacted the forms and spaces of participation. Taking on a historical perspective allows us to see which were the productive forces of these changes and of the new forms of organisation that were put in motion from the 1970s.

Departing from the assumption that 'formal' participation is directly – though not exclusively – related to the degree of democracy experienced by a people, we can say that historically in Brazil, many barriers have been implemented against the processes of popular participation. In this way, our investigation on this theme led us to examine how youth participation, as well as popular participation more generally, has been historically constituted in a country marked by years of slavery and successive periods of

authoritarian rule.

Ever since the arrival of the Portuguese all forms of mobilisation that were considered to be against the norms of the centres of power were severely put down, be it in the political or religious sphere. The struggle for freedom, such as in the case of the Quilombo dos Palmares, to cite just one example, was always repressed in order to keep the forms of domination intact.[4]

In 1937, the key actor that came to catalyse youth participation in an institutional form in the Brazilian political scene was born: the National Union of Students - UNE. The participation of young people had always been present in the past such as in the struggle for the abolition of slavery and for the creation of the republic; in the Federation of Brazilian Students, founded in 1910, and in the 1st Worker-student Congress, of 1934.[5]

In the time between the two dictatorships (1945 to 1964), we note in the direction taken by UNE, in its speeches and practices, a concern with the structural transformation of society. Adding its efforts to those of other social actors,[6] the Student Movement becomes one of the key agents of mobilisation and struggle for rights of the Reformas de Bases, the Reforms from the Base, a mass movement of reform which in the 1960s played a key role in the cultural and political scene in Brazil. All the effervescence of these years in Brazil also related to movements occurring in different parts of the world, in Latin America as well as Europe, but which though close, differed in their origins.

---

[4] Quilombo dos Palmares was a runaway slave stronghold in the Northeast of Brazil which survived for many decades in the 17th century before it was eventually defeated. Sader (2004) points out that the arrival of the Portuguese royal family deeply marked the process of political independence in Brazil, by establishing a "pact of the elite". Different from the Spanish colonies, which fought for a republican regime, taking advantage of the weakening of its metropolis which was involved in the Napoleonic wars, in Brazil, the pact between the elite in Brazil allowed for the establishment of a monarchy, postponing the end of slavery. This process delayed the formation of the Brazilian left, especially if we compare it to its South American neighbours, like Uruguay, Chile and Argentina.

[5] We can assume that from the moment when we see the emergence of resistance movements to the establishment in Brazil, there was the participation of young people. However, there is a lack of studies of the role of young people in these struggles, which tend to concentrate in the period of the republic and especially in the 1960s.

[6] Of note amongst these are the unions, the struggles for land rights, especially the Ligas Camponesas; and progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, amongst others.

The military coup, in 1964, harshly repressed the participation of many groups who were fighting for social transformation, and pushed their activities underground. In these conditions, the dictatorship sponsored a real hunt for the leadership of the UNE and of all of those who dared to challenge authoritarian rule, binding the unions to the State and repressing the various social movements. According to Filho (1988) soon after the coup, party members in favour of the dictatorship set the UNE building on fire in Rio de Janeiro.

The AI-5,[7] a National Security law decreed in 1968, intensified the repression of those who opposed the dictatorship, worsening the levels of persecution, imprisonment and killings of militants who were active in the 1960s. Amongst its results, AI-5 led to the dissolution of UNE, in 1973.

However, even with the situation worsening in the country in light of the dependency economic model adopted and the strong repressive state apparatus, there was a need to create new ways of participating. According to Sader (2004), despite the long years of repression, during the dictatorship, we witness the reorganisation of the national left in the creation of the Worker's Party PT, the Central Worker's Union CUT, and the Movement of the Landless Workers MST (Sader, 2004, p. 81).

A key actor in the fight against the military regime was the Catholic Church, through the Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEB) and through the perspective of a Liberation Theology. Seeking to organise the workers in the fields and cities, they increased their scope in the 1970s. The relevance of the CEBs in this period can be seen in the struggle against:

> "[...] the expropriation of land and the exploitation of work. Migrants and oppressed, the members of these communities, if at other times sought in religion a sedative for their suffering, now find a space of critical reflection before a dominant ideology and a popular organisation capable of resisting oppression. The national moment helped to reinforce the ecclesiastical base communities. In repressing the various channels of popular participation, the military regime

---

[7] The Institutional Act Number Five, or **AI-5** was an instrument that gave absolute power to the military regime and whose first and most significant result was the closing for almost a year of National Congress. The **AI-5** represented the pinnacle of the Military Regime of 1964 and initiated the period of the regime in which individual freedom were even more restricted and disrespected in Brazil. This was the final moment of the legalisation of the arbitrariness, which paved the way for torture and murder of the opposition to the regime. See: http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ato_Institucional_N%C3%BAmero_Cinco

made this same population seek another space to organise itself. This space was found in the Church (...)" (Betto, in Fernandes 1999) [*authors' translation*]

In this way the CEBs represented a democratic space of meeting and reflection for the workers, emphasising their role as historical subjects and politicising them about the oppression which they faced. Beyond this, it was possible to collectively create strategies for facing the challenges imposed by the military regime and the dominant elite. With this, we can say that one of the greatest achievements of the CEBs consists in their having provoked the masses to realise the need to organise and to struggle for change, as well as in aggregating different leaders who had been working independently in different political spheres.

Beyond the CEBs, still in the 1970s, many authors note the emergence of new forms and spaces of participation, different from those of previous decades: the New Social Movements - NSM. These authors point to the key difference between these movements and previous social movements as the weakening of the notion of class struggle, which had guided the practices of the traditional spaces of political action. The NSMs promoted and promote a new understanding of the relationship between civil society and the State.

Under the title of the 'New Social Movements' a whole range of different agendas are found, which nevertheless have certain similarities. In this way, one can speak of a repertoire of actions that range from the feminist movement, to ecological groups, pacifists, ethnic minorities, the unemployed, those for sexual diversity, amongst others.

The nature of these new social movements contributed to new ways of intervening and doing politics. The struggles pursued by the NSM focus in particular on the notion of 'autonomy' as opposed to the idea of hegemony and on the subject of rights as opposed to the notion of class.

Generally speaking the key contribution of the different kinds of social movements in Brazil over the last twenty years has been the reconstruction of the democratic process in the country. This entails the construction of democratic values, taking a role as agents who are placed in a direct dialogue with the state and with the population. The capacity to intervene and build the public sphere was one of the great achievements of this period.

For many authors, these changes in the field of politics and ideology, not only in Brazil, but in many other countries, have been especially significant since the end of the Cold War. For some authors, who characterise the present historical period as one of post-modernity, one of the features of this era is what Jean François Lyotard (1984) calls an 'incredulity' towards utopian projects, or meta-narratives – that is, the great stories or ideological projects which claim a monopoly on the truth which, instead of being followed, are now treated with irony, as vestiges of another age. Whether utopian projects are dead or not is an open question, however. Recent initiatives like the World Social Forum, which began in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001, or protests against globalisation as well as other events and mobilisations appear to contradict this claim, pointing to forms of participation and political engagement that are more adapted to the complex conjuncture of the present times. But even without burying utopia once and for all, we can note in the present era of global advanced capitalism profound changes in the lives of people across the globe regarding their political imagination. More specifically, in relation to this research and the participation of young people in the public sphere, we can focus on two important points that are significant in the present historical moment:

a) a new work culture;
b) the emergence of new actors of youth participation through new forms of participating which we here refer to as a D.I.Y. (do it yourself) culture.

The New Work Culture

Firstly, as Regina Novaes points out (2006) as a consequence of the globalisation of the market, there has been a shift in the world of work and the construction of what she terms a 'new work culture'. With growing insecurity in terms of the entry into the job market, young people from all social classes adopt new ways of meeting this challenge according to the resources available to them (see Novaes & Campello 2002). Comparing data from PNAD[8] between 1993 and 2003, we can see a significant reduction in the number of young people in the labour market in the metropolitan region of Rio Janeiro (47%, in 1993, and only 38% in 2003). [9]

The consequences of this can be seen in the longer periods of time spent in activities which may come to offer greater chances of being employed – language and IT courses, internships, a greater worry about the university entrance exam and with getting into a good university. For a number of young people from low-income families, the alternative is also seen as getting into governmental and non-governmental programmes and projects which may offer them opportunities for their insertion into the labour market. As such, the focus of a number of actions for young people from this sector of the population entail the provision of incentives: "through self-employment, or the opening of micro or small businesses, of work in co-operatives or associations, or by providing payment for carrying out some activity in Third Sector organisations" (Novaes, 2006, p.124).

Another recent phenomena in the voluntary sector is what we can term the 'curriculum activist'. This activist is found in many countries where this new work culture is felt, with an ever more demanding labour market seeking new talents and experiences amongst its employees. The curriculum activist is the person who does not necessarily have an emotional commitment to a cause, but who is active in its campaigns, NGOs, etc. to help his/her chances of entry into the labour market – which may not necessarily be in the public sphere.[10]

---

[8] National Census Data, conducted by IBGE, the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (see www.ibge.gov.br)

[9] Two factors can be said to be responsible for the reduction of young people in the labour market: increasing unemployment and longer periods of schooling.

[10] In the UK there is now a whole industry devoted to the period between the end of school and start of university to meet this demand for young people wanting to do something, in social or environmental projects. These involve paying to be a volunteer.

What seems significant here for the theme of our research is the hypothesis that the current greater preoccupation with the entry into the labour market and, consequently, the higher levels of competitiveness and individualism, may come to consume energies which in the past could have mobilised young people towards social participation. The question of participation then cannot be separated from the material conditions and the resources that make it possible to mobilise for particular causes and initiatives.

New actors of youth participation and the D.I.Y. culture

Categorised as apathetic and not engaged, the youth of today are compared to an important sector of youth which gained notoriety in the 1960s and 1970s, both in Brazil and elsewhere, but who were not, numerically speaking, the majority of young people at the time. As Novaes writes; "In this way we compare, a minority of the past with all youth in the present" (Novaes, 2006, p.117). The apparent apathy and lack of participation of young people today is also connected to a narrow understanding of the term 'political'. There is an emphasis on the negative take that youth have on politics and their low levels of engagement in institutional mechanisms, like traditional political organisations and the electoral process.

However, as Novaes (2006) points out, rarely are young people's answers compared to those of other age groups, as the low levels of participation and the disillusionment with politics and political representatives are phenomena that affect all sectors of the population. As this author and other researchers point out, there has been a general disenchantment and a disillusion with the re-establishment of the democracies in Latin America which have failed to keep their promises of overcoming social problems, clientalism and corruption or of consolidating popular forms of participation.

> "Some research shows that, for certain segments of the youth population, the disqualification of politics and the politicians comes accompanied by the re-appropriation of the idea of "citizenship", to where certain attributes of the political field are transferred, such as: action, conscientization, rights, valuing of collective spaces, resolution of problems, etc. In a number of groups of young people who today seek social inclusion we can note a particular intersection between the discourse of "citizenship" and the expression of the feeling of solidarity. This combination has been translated into ethical dispositions and concrete action in different spaces (that are not necessarily classified as political) in which they participate" (Novaes, 2006, p.118). [*authors' translation*]

Another important piece of data needed to comprehend youth participation in Brazil is the shift in profile of its actors since the 1960s. Today Abramo (2005), Novaes (2006) amongst others, describe the social background of young people who are mobilised to participate in public action as much more diverse than in the past when it was found to be almost entirely composed of young middle-class students.[11]

---

[11] 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).

> "These groups tend to articulate themselves in spaces that are geographically more diverse in order to bring about exchange in the field of culture, art, and to swap experiences of social action, to participate in articulations and mobilisations connected to their specific field of action, and to participate in campaigns and mobilisations related to the more general field of citizenship" (Novaes, 2006, p.118). [*authors' translation*]

In this way, it is important to understand the groups that do not organise themselves according to traditional political moulds and which articulate themselves around cultural forms like music, dance, art or more recently, cinema and the media.

We believe that an important dynamic for the emergence of these new actors is what we term a *Do It Yourself (D.I.Y.) Culture.* D.I.Y. is a process that creates youth cultures and which is based on the principle that youth can make, create, conquer their space and autonomy. This counter-cultural effervescence of youth can be seen throughout the 20th century in cultural movements such as the *beats*, *hippies, punks*, and now, in the case of Brazil, manifesting itself most explicitly in Hip Hop culture.

Stephen Duncombe, editor of the *Cultural Resistance Reader* (2002), like some young people we interviewed, relates his own trajectory as an activist, beginning in his youth through his encounter with counter-cultural movements. In his case, his encounter with punk music taught him his first lesson in politics: the importance of community.

> "Alone, I owned my problems: *I* was alienated, *I* was bored, *I* was too sensitive to injustice. But as a punk I found others who also had these problems, and since we all seemed to share them, *we* reasoned that they must be not just be ours, but society's problems" (Duncombe, 2002, p. 4).

Learning solidarity and mutual support Duncombe also learned his own power to create.

> "Like most people growing up in liberal societies and liberal economies, I was used to politics, products and entertainment being created and carried out by others for me, my own action being limited to spending a dollar and casting a vote. Punk taught me to DIY: Do-it-yourself. The idea that I could create my own culture – *do-it-myself* – was for me revolutionary, as it carried within it the promise that I could also create my own politics and my own world" (Duncombe, 2002, p.4).

Cultural resistance for Duncombe can be understood in the following five different ways: first, as a free space for developing ideas and practices away from the constraints of dominant culture and a place to build community and solidarity. Second as a stepping-

stone to political activism – where skills, ideas, confidence networks, etc. are acquired. Third as political resistance itself – re-writing cultural discourse with different forms, ideas, practices, etc, an act of resistance in itself. Fourth as an escape from politics, releasing discontent that might have otherwise been channelled into politics. And, fifth, it cannot exist – as any cultural expression is soon appropriated into the status quo.

Duncombe provides some useful observations of how culture conveys its politics which has aided our work in trying to map out the various spaces of the political. Culture expresses its politics in its content, for instance the lyrics of hip hop, samba, the theme of the film, photo, play, for instance. It also expresses politics through its form; say through an accessible and rhymed language in the case of rap, rather than writing on a page or spoken from a soap-box; an open play of the Theatre of the Oppressed rather than a play put on in a theatre where the tickets are expensive. How different cultural forms are appropriated or interpreted can also be manifestations of forms resistance – such as, using baggy jeans, without a belt, showing the underpants, originally amongst hip culture in low income communities in the US, originating amongst prisoners who could not wear belts in jail. And lastly, Duncombe argues that the political is also seen through the actual cultural activity and how it is produced; an illegal rave for instance is different from a party produced with sponsorship from corporations; the way of putting on a play with the methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed is different from that of a conventional theatre company.

In Brazil the cultural dynamics of D.I.Y. found within youth cultures throughout the globe and the use of culture as the raw material for reflection and praxis (coming from a Freirean pedagogy in the history of Brazilian civil society) meet in the present field of youth participation. The confluence of these two dynamics with the conditions produced by the current phase of advanced global capitalism and its new cultures of the labour market catalyses the specific forms of participation today.

Spaces of youth participation

With the above context in mind we now turn to the kinds of initiatives which we encountered in our research. Many 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. In this, we can identify a genealogy in the non-governmental sector of an alternative pedagogy that was much influenced by Paulo Freire and which comprised a key methodological component of the CEBs we have spoken of.

As Freire (1993 [1970]) argued, the teacher must learn from the student and depart from his/her symbolic universe and experience. Using cultural forms such as African rhythms, photography, cinema, as well as engaging with the communication media and its techniques, offers concrete ways of departing from the day-to-day experiences of young people towards a reflection of their day to day. They are means of reflecting on concrete experience and identifying the relations of power, exclusion and privilege which exist there, for instance, of how the *favelas* have been historically represented, of how African rhythms, even though historically repressed, have carried the trajectory of its people.

At the same time these cultural forms serve as raw material for reflecting on social, cultural, historical and political questions, they are also used as raw material for moulding and creating. In this way through photography, young photographers begin to really see their communities, through making movies, young people produce films which come to be shown in schools and other locations, and they also begin to circulate more through urban space, in this way re-imagining the city.

In this respect it is significant the number of organisations which 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. Notably, such reflections touch on how young people from working class backgrounds have been represented as 'dangerous', 'idle', as well as how the space of the *favela* has been seen as a place of danger and scarcity. 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.

Whereas we have in this article emphasised the new forms and spaces of youth participation, we cannot neglect that the traditional forms of struggle are still present and have great importance. We point to, for example, the participation of young people in legislative assemblies, in unions, in political parties that are conservative as well as progressive, in student movements, amongst others. In this way we note the importance of student organisation as a form of political mobilisation, as in the case of the 'Movimento Pinguin' in Chile, whose protests in 2006 provoked policy changes in the education sector. In the case of our research, we also noted the significant role that young people play in the Landless Movement, coming to take important leadership positions through this mass social movement.[12] We can also note the growth of the youth vote in recent elections in Brazil: according to the Superior Electoral Tribunal of 2006, there was a growth of 39.9% amongst 16 and 17 year olds who obtained their electoral register. In Brazil voting is compulsory after the age of 18 and voluntary from 16. This increase shows that young people are far from disinterested in traditional political processes. It is important to point out then, that "traditional" and "innovative" forms of political engagement co-exist in the public sphere. They are not mutually exclusive processes and it is not rare to find young people who participate in, for instance, relatively recent movements as well as political parties.

---

[12] 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.

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. 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 problematise 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" offers 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. But also, as we have pointed to here, we also need to be mindful of the politics that permeates around cultural activities and groups around which young people may also congregate. These reconceptualisations of the spaces and forms of the political, as well as the play of power and counter-power turn our gaze also towards the micro-processes and initiatives in which young people also participate in.

Bibliography

Abramo & Branco (org.) (2005) *Retratos da Juventude Brasileira.* Abramo, Helena 'Condição juvenil no Brasil contemporâneo'. Venturi, Brasília.

Alvim, Rosilene (2002) Olhares sobre a juventude' in Novaes, Regina. Porto, Marta. & Henriques, Ricardo (org.) *Juventude, Cultura e Cidadania.* ISER: Rio de Janeiro.

Balardini, Sergio (2005) ¿Qué hay de nuevo, viejo? Una mirada sobre los cambios en la participación política juvenil' *Revista de la CEPAL*, n 86 Santiago de Chile, Agosto.

Bordenave, Juan (1995) *O que é participação?* Ed. Brasiliense, São Paulo.

Coles, Bob (1995) *Youth and Social Policy: Youth citizenship and young careers.* UCL Press: London.

Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds.) (2004) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed Books: London,.

Cleaver, Frances (2004) Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development, in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds.) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed Books: London.

Duncombe, Stephen (2002) *Cultural Resistance Reader.* Verso: London.

Fernandes, Bernardo Mançano (1999) MST: movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem terra: formação e territorialização em São Paulo. Hucitec: São Paulo.

Flekkoy, M. G., & Kaufman, N. H. (1997) The Participation Rights Of The Child: Rights And Responsibilities In Family And Society. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Foucault, Michel (1991 [1975]) *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison.* Penguin: London.

Freire, Paulo (1993 [1970]) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Penguin Press: London.

Freire Costa, Jurandir (2005) Perspectivas da juventude na sociedade de mercado' em Novaes, Regina & Vannuchi, (org.) *Juventude e Sociedade: Trabalho, Educação, Cultura e Participação*. Venturi, São Paulo.

Guattari, Felix (1996) *Soft Subversions*. Semiotext: NewYork.

Guattari, Felix & Rolnik, Suely (2005) *Micropolítica; Cartografias do desejo.* Vozes: Petrópolis.

Hart R. (1997) *Children's Participation: the theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. Earthscan: London.

Heiko Henkel and Roderick Stirrat (2004) Participation as Spiritual Duty; Empowerment as Secular Subjection', in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds.) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Zed Books: London.

Isin, Engin & Turner, Bryan (Eds) (2002) *Handbook of Citizenship Rights.* Sage: London.

Johnson, V., Ivan-Smith, E., Gordon, G., Pridmore, P., and Scott, P. (1998) *Stepping Forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process.* Intermediate Technology Publications: London.

Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal (1985) *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics.* Verso: London.

Lyotard, Jean-François (1997) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Novaes, Regina & Mello, Cecília Campello (2002) *Jovens do Rio: circuitos, crenças e acessos.* Comunicações do ISER, Numero 57: Rio de Janeiro.

Novaes, Regina & Vannuchi, Paulo (org.) (2005) *Juventude e Sociedade: Trabalho, Educação, Cultura e Participação.* Venturi, São Paulo.

Novaes, Regina e Vital, Christina (2006) 'A juventude de hoje: (re)invenções da participação social' em A. Thompson (org.) *Associando-se à juventude para construir o futuro.* Editora Petrópolis: São Paulo.

Pais, José Machado (2000) 'Transitions and youth cultures: forms and performances'. International Social Science Journal. UNESCO.

Quiroga, Ana Maria (2002) 'A cidadania como indicador social' em Novaes, Regina. Porto, Marta. & Henriques, Ricardo (org.) *Juventude, Cultura e Cidadania.* ISER: Rio de Janeiro.

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

Rajani, Rakesh (UNICEF). (2001) 'The Participation Rights of Adolescents: A strategic approach'. United Nations Children's Fund, Working Paper Series Programme Division New York.

Reis Filho, Daniel Aarão (1988 [1968]) A Paixão de uma Utopia. Espaço e Tempo: Rio de Janeiro.

Sader, Emir (2004) A Vingança da História. Boitempo Editorial: São Paulo.

Souza, Janice Tirelli Ponte de (1999) Reinvenções da Utopia: A militância política de jovens dos anos 90. Hacker: São Paulo.

Souza e Silva, Jailson (2004) 'Meios de comunicação e espaços populares'. http://www.observatoriodefavelas.org.br

Turner, Bryan (Ed) (1994) *Citizenship and Social Theory*. Sage: London.

UNICEF (2003) *The state of the World's Children*. UNICEF: New York.

Ventura, Zuenir (2002) *Cidade Partida*. Companhia das Letras, São Paulo.