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Civil Society, Youthwork and alternatives to Globalization in Latino America

The youth groups doing social and political work can be seen as minorities in our Latino-American reality. However, minorities in history usually represent society trends. The youth movement that shook Paris and the world in 1968 was a minority in its beginning. If we look at the reality with traditional politics lens we could think that youth groups are doing very little things to change the structure of the economical and social system.

Sometimes young people have seen their social participation very critically and many times negatively: "I am doing nothing the change the reality". Differently each action and participation has to be viewed as a moment in an ongoing citizenship building process where we need to face the challenges of the Latino-America reality. Young people are also naturally existential not taking a historical perspective. Indeed social change process can not be compared with fate or destiny.

In Brazil the youth that fought back the dictatorship in the 60's and 70's was a minority that was announcing the overturned of the regime in the 80's. Thus minorities and majorities are not categories that exclude each other. The same seems to happen nowadays. Some very creative youth groups are expressing new trends in Latino America. However in our region a bigger part of youth is just trying to survive. To think in youthwork under globalization is to ask how youth can survive and be educated to have a job and a citizenship with social rights. What are the real possibilities to create jobs and to be citizen in Latino America? What are the major features of those trends embodied in youthwork aims to an active citizenship?

One of those trends in youth movements and organizations in general is: Direct interaction and action among people as the main way to acquire knowledge about reality. I think it is due the perception of the limits that came up with decades of super-evaluation of western rationality. After two world wars, the cold war conflicts and the turning point of the cultural and sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's, the next young generations came up with a very suspicious "feeling" about ideologies or well-elaborated social theories explaining the main features of the economical system. So youth groups should rethink the decision process of their culture and society. The critic on rationalism have to be followed by an integration of means of perception (feelings, intuition, traditions, common sense, poetry, spirituality and logics) of reality in the decision making process. What is to be rational? Rationality is the process to make choices among different options and different information about reality.

Along with the appraisal of direct interaction (taking into account feelings and intuitions as valuable means of acquiring knowledge) we also see the praise for diversity as a quality that should be present into youth organizations and youth work. Curiosity, search for pleasure, new experiences and to be part of a group, principal features of youth, can also be the lines of this new political movement even if it doesn't have yet a well-done political speech. The conflicts among the old political tradition and these new ways I believe will create and consolidate a culture of participatory decision making process in the coming future.

To call young people to youth work using the traditional ideological formula wouldn't work out anymore. To call young people to participate and create local solutions for local problems could be a better start considering them as experts of their own process driving their process. This is can be a better way to understand important driven-forces at a national and global scale that have important influence in local dynamics.

It is dangerous to generalize features of a youth for all regions of the world but we have yet to highlight clearly that this new generation has suffered and embodied the new-liberal

individualistic values and practices of competition that have followed the destruction of the well-fare state. In truth we Latino-Americans have never had a state like the European well-fare social system but only some public policies in health and education majorly. We have lost them since the new liberalism wave started in the 90`s. Thus those individualistic values meet an environment where the change in production systems destroyed millions of jobs and the amount of financial resources embodied in social projects was minimal. In a region where the concentration of incomes is one of the highest of the planet the situation got even worst with the spreading of narco-traffic industry offering thousands of out of law jobs to the youth in big cities of Latino-America. The average expectancy of life for youth working with drugs in Brazil is 23-25 years old. This is a Brazilian picture but it can be generalized to Latino American countries.

Accordingly with those hard conditions of life an expressive number of families have looked for social movements like the São Paulo city homeless movement and the Landless Peasants' Movement (MST) in order to survive. The life is still even harder to youth living in MST rural and urban settlements or old buildings but there they can get surviving skills easily as well as organizing skills. Along those two movements with important youth participation we also have the catholic church youth groups and the Hip-hop movement, that keeps the cultural bonds among Afro-American youth groups, being so the major four youth movements in Latino-America. Those movements have held their actions in a participatory approach, a "politics from below" instead of a political practice made by traditional and bureaucratized political parties and their activists. We could point out their references as helpful to us and our youth movements.

At the same time new movements and strategies as those from MST, Hip-Hop movement, Zapatistas, big demonstrations in the Europe and USA have to be taken as references but not as models to be followed. We need to understand each one of them in its social, political, historical, geographical aspects. They are no models at all into this new "ecological" paradigm where local solutions have to be local but where we can learn about our own reality exchanging good references internationally.

When we think about civil society and its subjects we split the terms civil and society we can have two results. Civil means something relating to citizens and their interrelations with one another or with the state and society means to me the totality of social relationships among humans. In Latin America only 5 percent of the population can be said that they are citizens even though those 300 million people are humans. So civil society means in a general description the available space allowed for the actual economical system to citizens, activists and common people to critic or marginally amend public policies (or the lack of them) made by a state. This state with few exceptions represents more and more the association of big multinational companies and banks with national elites.

The concept of civil society, however, raises many questions. What are the implications of the often unavoidably international or transnational dimensions of civil society itself? How much influence should organizations which are not elected and possibly represent a narrow interest group have on state policy? Does concentrating on the notion of civil society, rather than upon public policy, enable us to see history in a new light? And finally what is the space of youth groups in "a civil society map"?

In Latino America since the 80's we have seen the national governments being pushed by the financial international system, represented by the World Bank and IMF, to invest less and less in social structures and social projects necessary to balance the chronic concentration of incomes in our region. The ample social public policies aimed to the majority of the poor population were more and more restrict by agreements with IMF and World Bank.

In this meantime there were old organizations and groups in Latino America, including old student and youth organizations mainly connected with religious and socialist traditions. They were doing social work with important and consolidated references of social projects prone to be spread as public policies by the state and other organizations. They have not been empowered by the state or companies. In countries as Brazil to control the state structure is necessary to fulfil people's needs as a way to counter-balance the corporate power. However, historically, the state has been controlled by local elites nourished by European and North-American governments. There is no sign unfortunately that in the future national states will lose their position of regulating the national societies including the military system. So we need in Latino America to create a new social system including new and old organizations acting together with the state controlling and aiming it.

In Brazil in the last 25 years we have been building a very diverse grassroots network including youth movements. This national network built a strong political party, the Workers party, to change the Brazilian society. Thus this party naturally lost step by step the contact with local realities due the fact that parties used to organize themselves to get space in the state institutions. Most of the workers party activists mainly union workers and intellectuals were replaced to occupy state positions weakening the local work leaving an empty space that has to be occupied again. Indeed we need to understand the political parties' dynamics and the concentration of power in the actual democracies. We need to see clearly the limits of the state and to create a strong grassroots network in order to say what society wants from the state. Can Civil Society be this new form of society control over the state?

In the way of building a party to change the Brazilian society that grassroots network had a correct evaluation. To control the state structure is fundamental to disconcentrate incomes and to spread social justice. However this control I believe has to be made from outside as well as inside of state institutions.

This same process about means and ends of civil society is happening internationally. The world social forums in Brazil is a example of a big effort to gather all those experiences from grassroots around the world expressing a conscious and unconscious desire of the majority of the population for social changes. Meetings among activists when really brings the diversity of actions, organizing methods and strategies can really teach us about the unseen aspects of our own reality bringing also consciousness about common driven forces aiming our societies.

From the standpoint of Ecological and thermodynamics studies different systems (biological organisms or even societies) are sustainable in long term only if they keep internal diversity (both in quality and quantity), stability and resilience (or flexibility) to cope with pressures and changes. Those principles I believe can be used to stimulate and boost our youth networks and movements.

The youth movement have to understand that its main mission is to empower itself through local actions establishing local structures and independent relation with the state and political parties as well as to build open meetings with diverse attendance organized in a participatory way by the participants. It can be the main form to acquire alive knowledge about reality. Additionally to be a movement imply to invest in education skills training for the members (organizing skills, media skills, international and national relations skills) financial structure and political independence.

Finally I would like to have a brainstorm on some ideas to improve youth work based in those principles:

- We need to see ourselves as collective and popular educators and prepare ourselves to this “art”,
- Diverse and participatory youth meetings has to be a collective thing where each one has the same space to expression as well as responsibility to provide the same space for the others,
- Youth computing networks has to work together and humbly to spread the word of every sing youth group and youth person around the world,
- Youth groups should build and run youth centres around the world. Safe spaces to youth groups and individuals to express their culture where they can go to have societal information, political and organizational skills, computing services, workshops, lectures, meetings and job skills training connected with the local reality where the centre will be placed. Old buildings and industries can be rented to do this bringing artists and young designers to create an enjoyable environment,
- Politics has to be seen as an art of tolerance as well as a way to build common ideas and sustainable social structures for society,
- A strong movement is not a unified one. A strong movement is one where there is space for different people to work and be happy,
- Movements as people grow up and die one day. Let’s concentrate our efforts in building values and an ethical behaviours more than physical structures or names,
- Youth issues are not a thing that has to be addressed only by young people. Health public policies are not an issue that has to be addressed only by sick people. We need to bring for our movement every single person that can help us to empower youth.

Youth is a vehicle that brings new trends to society in the same way youth has a lot of energy to challenge the life unfolding the future.

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