

Revista Interamericana de Educación para la Democracia

**RIED IJED**

Interamerican Journal of Education for Democracy



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**Vol 4 , No. 2**

January, 2013

Document available in:  
[www.ried-ijed.org](http://www.ried-ijed.org)

**ISSN: 1941-1799**



# "New citizenships: Identitary processes of young adults involved in social action"

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## Abstract

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This article reveals the initial findings of ongoing research on young adults, who voluntarily, became members of a new collective action generation (Melucci, 2002), that creates organizations for the development of communitarian educational interventions as means to rebuild everyday contexts of trust and meaning, Lechner (1998), for outcast youngsters, through collective participation and organization empowerment.

By using focus groups and life stories to explore the meaningful life's components of youngsters organization members' Acciones para el Desarrollo Comunitario, A.C., a non-governmental organization, in order to think on formal processes of civic education from de non formal education experiences. These findings highlight the significance of the self-identification process among young adults, including localized civic engagement and mechanisms for inter-generational transmission.

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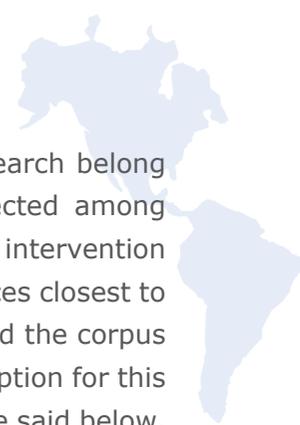
## Introduction

During recent decades, the questioning, expectations and demands made of the field of education have made it an ideal space for restoring and/or renewing imaginaries around the idea of transforming society. This has been manifested in intensified interest around the relationship between education and citizenship (Smith, 2010).

Education thus becomes the option in which multiple, diverse hopes are placed, for confronting the challenges arising from

deep transformations, both from forms of subjectification and visions of society. These changes find points of reference in the forms of citizen participation that reveal the loss of density (Martuccelli, 2008, 8) characterizing labor unions and political parties, which were previously the primary forums for constructing collective identities. Since the 1980s, traditional forms of anti-establishment participation in Mexico have coexisted and/or formed new types of citizen activism, increasingly professionalized, with more specific and less ideological aspirations. The crisis generated beginning in 1981<sup>1</sup> established a context in

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which new civil organizations emerged, focused on social development and which, added to those already existing, were articulated in networks with the aim of achieving greater impact and optimization of limited resources through their efforts at influencing social public policies.

Various authors such as Reygadas (1998), Charry and Calvillo (2000), and Fernández (2010) underscore high critical ability, autonomy and constructive capacity as the characteristic features of these social actors. It is for these reasons that these actors find themselves able to organize themselves and take actions aimed at promoting changes in all aspects of social life. It is for all of these reasons that these civil organizations are able to define themselves, act, govern themselves, and in general, make decisions regarding themselves and their actions.

They are citizens who, far from acting in line with market logic, construct their proposals on the basis of a sense of ethics, assumed as praxis, as an attitude of social responsibility. This takes place in the most emphatic manner in the organizations dedicated to defending human rights in general, and in particular those focused on women, children and indigenous peoples, as subjects possessing *a different political-moral order*.

This article presents the initial findings of a biographical, narrative study that investigates the identitary processes of young adults who become involved in and committed to practices of social action through the founding of organizations that carry out projects in communitarian educational intervention targeting other young adults, with the aim of assisting them in gaining skills in self-management processes that will allow them to confront, in a participative manner, the collective problems faced in their communities.

The informants in this research belong to an organization that was selected among others carrying out educational intervention projects with young adults. Practices closest to participative citizenship constituted the corpus of the criteria that sustained the option for this organization, of which more will be said below.

The purpose of this article is thus to share some findings revealed through the life stories of and focus groups with the young adults who founded a civil organization.

Some features of the social and family contexts of the informants are emphasized, to then point to the role played by two formative experiences that were substantial factors in these young adults becoming involved in social action.

Lastly, emphasis is placed on some lines of reflection from informal educational experiences and based on the processes for constituting the social subjects who promote these practices. This is in response to the need to confront the complexity involved in the formation of critical, participative citizens, beyond a curricular or cognitive level.

## **1. Antecedents, statement of problem and research questions**

The antecedent to this research is a study (Fernández, 2010) that addressed the trajectories and meanings assigned by subjects to their actions of joining and making a commitment to the aims of civil society organizations that have been constructing democratic, participative citizenship in Mexico for over two decades.

Among the most significant findings from the previous study, also conducted on the basis of life stories, was that the introduction of these actors into social processes takes place in a manner that is more complex and closer to subjectivity than to structural determination.



In the informants' testimonies, they revealed that in their processes of subjectification, there were clear ruptures with their parents' mandates and projects that gave rise to their processes of searching for themselves and for the autonomy to realize their potential through collective work. This collective work takes place within groups that function as spaces for the affective support that allows them to dialogue, trust and recognize themselves as equals within their differences. This occurs in such a way that social participation—more than an ideological project—is experienced as a form of expression and the realization of an identity project.

Throughout the twenty years since the so-called boom in civil organizations promoting social development, the networks of organizations that have promoted projects for democratizing everyday life have, together with the rest of Mexican society, witnessed intense political, social and economic turbulence and changes that have contributed to defining the strategies as well as the aspirations and possibilities for action of these promoters of collective meanings.

Despite the increasing precariousness that currently confronts this sector of civil society, it is still possible to find groups of young adults who, on a volunteer basis, become involved as part of a new generation of collective action (Melucci, 2002). They are creating organizations for developing projects in communitarian educational intervention as a way to reconstruct habitual contexts of trust and meaning (Lechner, 1998) for young adults from marginalized communities, so that these might become places for integration, identification and the rebuilding of social bonds. Who are these young adults who, two decades later, become involved in these forms of social action? What do they share with their predecessors? In what ways are they different?

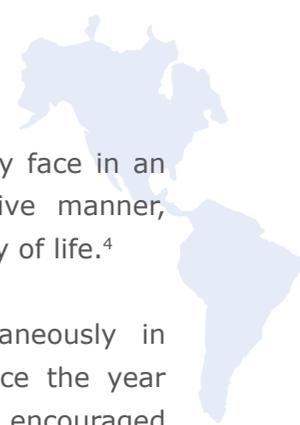
In what way do they feel challenged by the public sphere?

## **2. Some methodological and conceptual observations**

The field of inquiry that serves as the context for this work refers to notions that require a clear explanation of the conceptual positioning around the notions of: citizenship, identity and youth.

This work is based on the conviction that it is not possible to establish fixed coordinates with a notion of identity restricted to the features of positions or states of belonging. It is based on a notion of identity that is the result of social interactions and reciprocal recognition that lead to ongoing processes of construction and reconstruction (Aceves, 2001).

If we possess an identity, it is because we can tell stories about ourselves. *I* is a creation of our narratives, according to Bruner (1994). The narration of one's own history becomes a type of self-understanding that makes it possible to determine who we are through what we have become, as a search that allows a mode for re-thinking life itself. This inquiry is therefore conducted on the basis of reviewing the literature and documentary information, participative observation, life stories and focus groups, with the aim of entering into the significant de-coding of the relevant components and dimensions of the lives of these new, young social actors. In this way and in concordance with the methodological perspective sustained by House and Howe (1999) and Mason and Delandshere (2010) for conducting research in the field of citizen formation, a possibility opened up for more active involvement by the informants/subjects who had the opportunity to question, reflect, dialogue and deliberate.



The notion of citizenship assumed here is participative and deliberative, in other words, closer to republicanism (Pettit, 1999). Without negating the value of an individual's autonomy, it sustains the recognition of a notion of the *common good*<sup>2</sup> constructed—not on the basis of the principles of good, which are pre-established by tradition or beliefs, but rather—over the course of the deliberation that arises on the basis of the shared will to constitute a political community.

This type of citizenship is that which has been sustained, since the 1980s, by so-called civil society theorists (Klymka and Wayne, 1994). It does not imply the renouncement of pluralism in conceptions of life, as one of the unquestionable assets of civil society since its origins (Cortina, 1993).<sup>3</sup>

Since this work is focused on young adults, it is important to point out that the notion of youth is acknowledged as having meaning that is not restricted by age. Rather, in terms of both historical category and cultural construction, it is subject to permanent recomposition that, at any rate, alludes to the many different forms in which different cultures identify the processes of passage from childhood to adulthood.

### **3. Informants: founders of a civil organization**

Life stories, as well as comments made in focus groups, were collected from interviews with members of a non-profit civil society organization that, since 2005, has defined the following as their mission:

Strengthen the organization and collective participation of communities in our country, through various educational processes for developing the necessary abilities and tools to

confront the problems they face in an autonomous, comprehensive manner, thus improving their quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

This organization works simultaneously in various community projects. Since the year 2000, the founding group has encouraged young adults in senior high school to work in literacy and adult education campaigns in rural communities.

We think of young people as a group with enormous potential for transformation in the short term, and if we manage to consolidate a critical, self-management perspective, this potential will continue for the long term [...].

As an effect of the learning and work experience acquired from literacy work in rural areas, this organization created in 2007 a second project entitled *Tlalana*<sup>5</sup>: *Young Adults and Self-Management*, with the aim of promoting groups with the capacity for conducting local, participative, viable and self-sustainable projects that—with their own vision created from within—improve living conditions in their surroundings and promote activities that generate opportunities for meeting others, for recreational purposes, for expression, to then interact with the community and become involved in their development.

[...] the groups of young people define the topics of their projects in line with their interests and their vision of the community.

In the different contexts in which these young adults become involved, their objective is for communities to be able to continue to work autonomously after the educational intervention project ends. To this end they seek



to promote the personal growth and learning of both those associated with and benefiting from the project. Consequently, they work in ways that assure respect for human rights and the environment, as well as for the culture of communities, within dialogue and deliberation processes for making decisions regarding matters of collective interest.

For this organization, each project should contemplate mechanisms that guarantee transparency, evaluation, monitoring and systematization, in order to be able to then share what has been learned with other civil society organizations.

### 3.1 *Not excluded or incorporated*

In order to study the conditions in which the aspirations of these young adults are produced, it is important to identify the elements of the social structure, as well as the place within that structure, that these young subjects occupy (Bourdieu, 1998, 151). While one's membership in a given class does not impose one's destiny, it can outline the path that one's life will take. In all of the life stories from the informants, there is evidence that they had what Nagel (2004) called basic support for the development of a certain autonomy that would permit them to think and to think things through, to then imagine and carry out projects.

They grew up in environments that were able to provide them with enough initial support, in both material and affective terms, to prevent them from becoming part of the increasing, devastating sector of many millions of young adults in Mexico who are excluded from employment, from education and from having a future.

These young civil society actors do not live on a day-by-day basis; they do not confront the precariousness of those who inhabit the

*pure present*, or the immediacy that wears away the possibilities for recognizing others pain as their one.

It is not necessary to be part of emotionally intense communities, or to participate in counterculture demonstrations typical of neotribalism (Maffesoli, 1990) in order to anchor their identities.

While all of them may be members of the so-called middle class and may have access to higher education, they do not fit exactly into the category of *incorporated* young adults (Reguillo, 2000, 24). They have not surrendered to the media-produced seduction of consumerism; nor do they have aspirations to become part of the business culture of *excellence* in order to affirm themselves as *valuable* individuals (Anzaldúa, 2006, 17).

If one would want to classify them in a certain category, in an attempt to place them on the cultural map, they could be included among those described by Reguillo (2000, 24) as *alternative*. It would be necessary to acknowledge, together with Reguillo, that "the bottom line cannot be reduced to a dispute over the legitimate representation of what it means to be young today."<sup>6</sup>

From Melucci's perspective (2002, 72), social action is sustained in part by those who are in marginalized or peripheral positions with respect to the labor market. These actors are relatively young, with high levels of education, and as Melucci adds, some of them are prosperous.

In the case of the informants in the current study, who founded a Mexican civil organization in the 21st century, not only are they not prosperous, but unlike their predecessors twenty years ago, they do not have regular income from relatively stable formal employment.<sup>7</sup> In fact this situation constitutes one of their greatest concerns.



I'm worried about my country, and about not being able to find a job that I like and that provides me with a living. (participant in Focus Group 1)

Even so, in both their life stories and the group interviews, they do not mention any type of aspirations linked to the consumption of material goods, and instead what is notable is their desire to become key players in processes of change:

Someday, I'm going to make an important contribution to changing this world. (interview with Informant 5)

I'd like for us to be able to develop a coordinated process through which we transform reality. (interview with Informant 5)

### **3.2 Family: initial support**

The life stories of the members of civil organizations that played a key role in processes in Mexico for democratizing social life during the 1980s (Fernández, 2010) refer to contexts with relatively stable nuclear families, with clear differences between the roles assumed by mothers and fathers. In all the cases, mothers were dedicated to household tasks and had not studied at the higher education level; they had received an explicitly religious education, attending religious schools. At some time during their lives, they had faced moments of breaking away and searching for themselves, involving passing through liminal<sup>8</sup> periods, after they had refused to be the way they were expected to be as women.

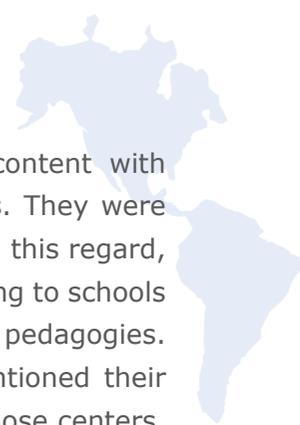
They rejected authoritarianism, the lack of equality in gender relationships, and abuse, and they rejected academic knowledge divorced from an ethical dimension in order to, in the end, enter into processes of constituting

an identity form of reflexive identity (Dubar, 2002). The informants in the current research also sustain this identity form that results from a reflexive consciousness and that is appropriate for developing the capacity for interacting with and discovering others, as well as the processes for developing cooperation and conflict, through which the subject actively commits to—

A project that has subjective meaning and that involves identification with an association of peers sharing the same project. Corresponding to this *We*, composed of those close to and similar to one another, is a specific form of *I*, which can be referred to as one's reflexive self. It is the face of this *I* that each person wishes to be recognized by the "significant" Others belonging to their project community. (Dubar, 2002, 67)

The major difference from their predecessors is that in the life stories of this new generation of social actors, there are no references to critical periods during which they are not affiliated with an inherited order, to then later become part of another. The reason is that it appears this was not necessary. In all the interviews, the young adults mention the social activities carried out by their parents, whether through participation in civil society organizations, development work in rural communities in extreme poverty, or political participation in movements or actions opposing the violation of political and social rights. Some of them even have pleasant memories of accompanying their parents, when they were very young, in demonstrations, or in the work they carried out in rural communities.

While most of these young adults narrate their childhoods within non-nuclear



families, with divorced parents, they are clear references to networks in which they were held within, taken care of and accompanied—making it possible for them to be closely listened to when they needed this. They grew up protected by the careful eye of an adult who, because of his/her own participation in social action and in new social movements, could acknowledge that children and adolescents possess rights, one of which is to express opinions on matters with which they are concerned. Thus, being taken care of and listened to throughout their entire childhood, these young adults adopted a horizontal type of ethics, given some particular provisions in their formation.

#### 4. Two crucial formative experiences

The new models of collective action are configured as an effect of the coexistence of the historical and cultural elements that reveal the influences and legacies that persist in contemporary phenomena (Melucci, 2002, 117).

Even though there are significant differences in age among the informants, two particular experiences that had an impact on the identity of these actors are given special mention, without exception, in all of the life stories. In some of the testimonies, these references are made with an epiphanic tone. These two experiences are having attended so-called alternatives schools, and having participated in literacy campaigns in rural communities.

##### 1.1 *The new school gave me back my life*

Most of those interviewed began their school life in institutions they considered to be *traditional* and/or *conservative*.<sup>9</sup> When they found themselves in situations that were unacceptable to them, they had the

opportunity to declare their discontent with authoritarian-type teaching styles. They were able to express their viewpoints in this regard, and received assistance in switching to schools with perspectives closer to critical pedagogies.

Informants frequently mentioned their good memories of school life in those centers, and they would often use terms such as *happy*, *happiness* and *freedom*.

There was a lot of academic pressure, but lots of freedom, lots of responsibility. (interview with Informant 1)

[...] at my first school, I was very unhappy. And I was the only student whose parents were divorced. I told my mother: children's rights are not respected at that school [...] When I got to the other school, I saw that there were many types of families. One girl in my class even had two mothers. It was really nice, and I think that's when a little engine was sparked that opened my eyes to a lot of diversity. (interview with Informant 5)

At the new school, they helped me a lot to cope with the separation of my parents [...] (interview with Informant 3)

When I started at the new school, I got my life back, and I was extremely happy. (interview with Informant 6)

Testimonies like those just presented give an idea of the role played by educational institutions that are based on the principles of critical pedagogy and that maintain a high level of academic standards in a framework of inclusion, tolerance, freedom and responsibility. These institutions seem to have created a suitable climate for developing the autonomy to handle differences without violence, and for promoting a relationship with knowledge that



is more focused on inquiry and reflexion than on the accumulation of information. These are key conditions for the formation of critical thinking and deliberative capacities—two of many challenges that are currently facing schools wishing to contribute to the formation of active citizens.

Among the didactic strategies used by the teachers of these young adults, some of them are especially noteworthy due to the pleasure with which they are narrated by the informants. These are strategies that evoke traditions from what was known as the New School that emerged at the end of the 19th century. In particular they refer to techniques used by Célestine Freinet (1976).

I loved the cooperative, writing my life book, that they didn't give any homework, the printer, and above all, the assembly for which I was once president. (interview with Informant 1)

These testimonies referred—without the informants being aware<sup>10</sup>—to moments in their trajectory covered by a *corpus of protection* that operated for these young adults as a transmission channel, to gain access to focal points of meaning that in some way *sustained the strand of their identity* (Debray, 1997, 21-23).

It was not difficult to trace back the work carried out by teachers who were Spanish refugees and their descendants and who, in Mexico, implemented educational projects inspired in pedagogical traditions and ethical-political positions congruent with the best ideals of what is referred to as the Second Spanish Republic. This is the case of schools that reveal in their names the influence remaining from teachers and institutions such as Bartolomé Cossío, Herminio Almendros and the Institute-School, in explicit reference to

the Institute-School created in Spain in 1918.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate some of the characteristic features of this pedagogical approach, it is particularly worth mentioning that among the educational practices at Spain's Institute-School was one that does away with text books, pressures and threats "[...] in a climate of respect and solidarity, which doesn't hinder them from developing with assurance [...]"<sup>12</sup>

Today, in Mexico, there are various institutions that depict this type of tradition expressed through statements such as the following:

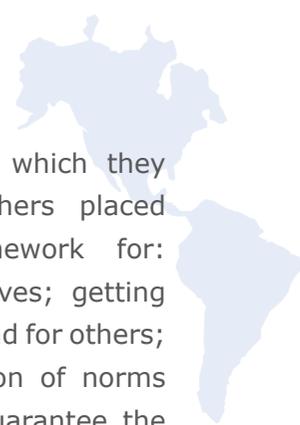
We are members of a civil society composed of a group of professors who are from different fields of study and who have provided structure to an ideal in which freedom, respect, reasoning and cooperation are part of daily learning.<sup>13</sup>

Around the 1980s, in addition to these teaching faculties, which held pedagogical beliefs, values and skills, there were also *traces of another collective lineage of re-creation* (Debray, 1997, 26), drawing on the ethical standards and educational experiences that unfolded in a number of Latin American countries as a result of the social actions carried out in the name of Liberation Theology<sup>14</sup> and the practices from what is known as Popular Education.

#### 4.2 Adolescents working in literacy efforts

The [literacy]misión was like another point in time that had a major impact in my life. A great deal of who I am now and the things I believe in began there. (interview with Informant 5).

Inspired by the pedagogical contributions of Paulo Freire, various literacy campaigns



initiated during the 1980s in Central American countries demonstrated the effectiveness of their reflexive practices aimed at promoting—within marginalized communities—forms of collective action based on the autonomy of analysis for understanding reality and its transformation.

In Mexico, at the beginning of that same decade, and as an initiative of the former *Centro Activo Freire* (CAF), students were invited to become involved as volunteers in the first literacy *misión* rural areas.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the objective of teaching adults to read and write, this *misión* proposed from the beginning to become a substantial part of a formative project that managed to involve a number of alternative schools in the following decades.

The founders of the civil organization that we are studying here had their first experiences *as literacy workers when they were still enthusiastic adolescents and were embarking on* this formative process. They were unaware at that time of the implications of this experience for their future.

At the beginning, I went because my friends went [...] at that age, you don't go because you say: I'm out to change the world! (interview with Informant 3)  
It was an opportunity to spend several weeks away from home and far from your parents. (interview with Informant 2)

In the life stories of all the interviewees, this first experience in literacy work was given a special place, and it seemed to have defined their processes of passing from childhood to adulthood.

It was an aspect of my life that served as a trigger. (interview with Informant 1)

This experience in a setting in which they were learning to live with others placed these adolescents in a framework for: taking responsibility for themselves; getting organized and working together and for others; becoming part of the construction of norms for living together that would guarantee the continuity of educational intervention in the communities. All of this also produced effects on the ways they related to knowledge:

Because of the literacy work, I could begin to attach more meaning to what I had learned in school, and expand on it. It was as if everything had new meaning. I learned to handle my emotions and I learned to make decisions. (interview with Informant 3)

Today, these young adults have within their collective assets the knowledge accumulated during eleven adult literacy *misiones*.<sup>16</sup> These *misiones* have attempted to bring other adolescents closer to the reality of rural communities in our country, in order to help them develop their abilities to understand that reality and transform it. To this end these campaigns have promoted a type of community organization that provides tools and links that can generate self-management processes that respond to local needs.

From this framework of aspirations, they assume that...

[...] the teaching-learning process should be understood in context and in a critical, unrestricted way, so that there is not only learning, but also understanding, through interaction, experimentation, trial and error, and collective experience.<sup>17</sup>



In order to carry out their educational intervention, the adolescent literacy workers go through a prior process of training and development of didactic materials to be used in the literacy *misiones*.<sup>18</sup> It is important to emphasize that, if this experience would have impacted all the young literacy workers in the same way, it would have produced entire armies of young adults deeply involved in social action, but that is not what happened. Not all the young literacy workers became social actors. What we can learn from the interviews is that those who were interviewed also had some cultural pre-conditions (Brezinka, 1999, 11-16) and some particular processes of subjectification that made it more likely that they would empathize with and become committed to those who are excluded.

To see, to hear, from so close up, people's lives [...] The effects of migration on families, people's pain is overwhelming, it can make you feel powerless, it can open your eyes. Even though you know you won't change things, something starts to take shape. (interview with Informant 3)

In light of the testimonies of these young adults, a possible interpretation, subject to further exploration, is that the literacy work experience is a moment in which a symbolic transgenerational circuit is activated—experienced in other ways by their parents, and in a couple of cases, even by their grandparents, also members of civil organizations and/or social movements promoting social development or human rights defenders.

## 5. The sense of belonging and the public sphere

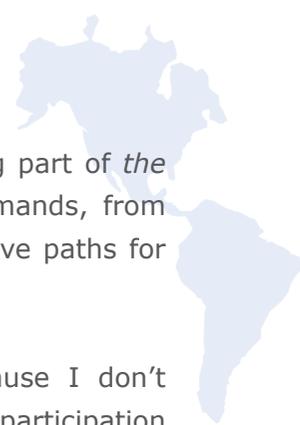
The collective interviews made it possible for various constellations of meanings to emerge around the way in which these young adults feel challenged by the public sphere. In this regard what was most interesting was their style of handling differences, as well as the evidence of deliberative habits including the capacity to listen, to engage in dialogue, and to clearly formulate their ethical and political positions.

In response to the notions that were used to spark discussion in the groups, including "country and politics," among others, each member of the group formulated, first of all, their personal position, then defended their position from arguments against it, and in a short period of time, and after some argumentative shifts, they were able to identify the different points in the debate, to then make some attempts at constructing positions of consensus.

### 5.1 Country and citizenship

In response to this topic, offered to those interviewed in order to investigate its meaning, a shift was observed in the debate that grew out of a unanimous opposition to nationalism. Their disappointment in relation to their country was then formulated, together with their interest in prioritizing justice over a territorial notion of a nation. And they ended up acknowledging a more regional, and finally, a more planetary sense of belonging.

I used to be nationalist, but now I think I am less and less so—it has increasingly less importance in my life. (participant in Focus Group1)



I love my country, and I can't explain why I feel this way about my country, but even so, it's disappointing me a great deal. (participant in Focus Group1)

To be a citizen is to be an active subject, but it has nothing to do with the State, because I don't believe in the State. (participant in Focus Group 1)

I feel more Latin American. (participant in Focus Group1)

For me, justice is an engine that gets me moving, since you have to become a little bit of a citizen of the world, even though it sounds like a cliché, but this is the type of thing that inspires you to work, not only for Mexico, but for people—who are the same everywhere. (participant in Focus Group 1)

### 5.2 *The other politics: non-State politics*

Beyond coinciding with the lack of interest in politics—as expressed by 60% of those surveyed in the Fourth National Survey on Political Culture and Civic Practices (2008)<sup>19</sup>—the informants declared something more than mere disaffection. In all cases, they gave the reasons for their clear aversion to the practices of the so-called *national political class*.

Plain and simple, everyone finds the word *political* disgusting. (participant in Focus Group 2)

Despite the variety of ways for expressing their aversion to official politics, those interviewed defined two different meanings for the notion of politics, in order to distance themselves from one and include themselves in the other. They feel disdain toward State politics, especially the politics characterizing political parties, and

they identify themselves as being part of *the other politics*, which initiates demands, from other places, to propose alternative paths for having an impact.

This is what we do because I don't like the opportunities for participation offered by the State. (participant in Focus Group 2)

I think the way to seek other means for expressing that we aren't in total agreement is from the trenches of civil society, and this is precisely the option we've chosen. This is my decision personally because it is the most viable way to generate change in the political system. I think our actions are political actions. The literacy campaign is political, and Tlalana is political—precisely because we engage in politics as citizens, and that's what we're fighting for. (participant in Focus Group 2)

We've opted for other paths, not the government's paths. There are many others that have not been recognized as alternative paths for citizen participation. There are many efforts being made by urban and rural communities. But there are different types of trenches—politics through pressure is different from politics through construction. (participant in Focus Group 2)

## Conclusions

From a methodological perspective that is more congruent with the features of participative citizenship that leads to reflexive practices, dialogue and deliberation, this research used focus groups to enhance the possibilities for exploring meanings. It was thus possible



to reveal how, through specific forms of handling differences, informants construct a *commonality* (Arendt, 1993) that provides the foundations for processes of constituting social subjects. This *commonality* also emphasizes the need to concentrate educational efforts on strengthening an acknowledgement of what everyone has in common in order to reestablish the dimension of the public sphere as a substantial part of life for subjects in formation.

The two formative experiences emphasized here opened up the opportunity for these young adults to be part of the collective construction of a type of coexistence. In the schools they attended, they found a place where differences were included and where they could learn to express their own opinions and respect the opinions of others. They developed capacities for engaging in debate and constructing agreements, as a result of their participation in assemblies and the fact that the regulated expression of students' opinion is a key aspect of educational practices in this type of institution.

The voluntary participation by these young adults in literacy campaigns leads to reflection on the role that may be played by providing students with an opportunity to make their own decisions and take responsibility for the consequences of those decisions. Being part of a shared project for the benefit of a community is crucial for civic education. However, being part of it on a volunteer basis and without direct, on-site supervision by teachers or parents seems to be even more crucial, as a source of intellectual and emotional development, as well as autonomy and social commitment.

This consideration points to the need to work around the impact and potential from learning among peers.

It is also important to emphasize that not everything depends exclusively on schools, and there is also a great need to create spaces in other spheres of formation and transmission, in order to analyze the possibility of enhancing synergy with the efforts in schools.

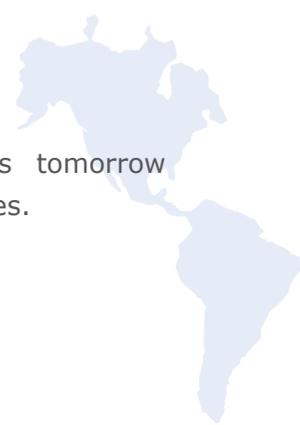
As a result of the life stories of young adults involved in promoting processes of participation and self-management in other young adults, it was possible to highlight the role played by cultural and biographical dimensions, with the aim of learning more about the ways in which these new social actors operate as *living links* in chains of meaning (Debray, 1997, 28).

From an intergenerational perspective<sup>20</sup> (Alvarado and Vommaro, 2010, 17), this reveals that this path of accessing communities of meaning does not involve repetition or continuity, since as pointed out by Potel (2010, 259), what is disseminated will always be different than what is inherited.

[...] repetition, since it can never be repeated, is condemned to produce what is new, that is, events, the other.

Thus, while this new generation of social actors offer *acknowledgement of receipt*, by sharing part of their aspirations, and their work and intervention styles with their predecessors, they provide evidence of the signs of their times, and in their search, they inaugurate new ways of understanding themselves and taking actions, knowing that it doesn't work to—

Fiercely defend one of our belongings, but rather to multiply them, to the contrary, in order to enrich flexibility. We must make the oriflamme of the map-document of identity whip like the wind or dance like a flame. (Serres, 1995, 199-200)



It will be for this reason that these social actors and those in the future will be able to, despite

everything, re-group themselves tomorrow under other names and new causes.

## Endnotes

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1. This was an economic crisis resulting from: a reduction in oil revenue, an increase in interest rates and an enormous increase since 1973 in loans to Mexico from the World Bank and private banks. During this period the debt accumulated with the World Bank alone had increased from 118 million to 460 million by 1981, and the debt contracted with private banks was ten times greater.
2. A common good is that "[...] which no one can obtain for oneself, but rather to the degree that it is also obtained for others, perhaps for all others [...] the norms associated with the attainment of this good may not be internalized before there is identification with the group whose well-being is served." Pettit, P. (1999). *Republicanism. Una teoría sobre la libertad y el gobierno* (p. 335). Barcelona: Paidós.
3. Cortina (1997) refers to the period of the emergence of civil society organizations which, beginning during the final decades of the past century, raised the banners of new social movements.
4. <http://www.adeco.org.mx/> (February 3, 2011).
5. *Tlalana*, in Nahuatl, means to put down roots.
6. Reguillo, R. (2004). La performatividad en las culturas juveniles. *Revista Estudios de Juventud*, 64, 49-56.
7. Fernández, A. (2010). *Formación, Ciudadanía e Identidad. Voces de la Sociedad Civil*. Mexico: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.
8. This is how Turner (1988) referred to the rites of passage for transitional subjects who go through periods of not being affiliated with an inherited order, and then become affiliated with another.
9. This category was used by informants to refer to both public and private schools, both religious and secular schools.
10. It was enough that they mentioned the names of some of their teachers or the directors of their schools to track the pedagogical generational links.
11. The Institute-School was an educational project promoted from 1918 up until the collapse of the republican government in 1939. The intention of this project was to reform first and second teaching, incorporating innovative pedagogical procedures that emphasized students' active participation.
12. Ontañón, E. (2007). El Instituto-Escuela, Un proyecto educativo vigente. [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com) (April 2, 2011).



13. <http://institutoescuela.edu.mx/prepa.htm> (April 2, 2011).
14. This is the name commonly used to refer to an interpretation of the Christian faith through the suffering, struggle and hope of poor people that leads to criticism of societies in which inequality is justified, as well as of the church's practices that fail to directly address the effects of exclusion.
15. Literacy workers use their vacations to organize their stay in communities. At the same time that they dedicate time to literacy work and/or to helping adults in educational tasks at the primary or secondary level, they also learn about and understand the thinking processes, lifestyles and problems experienced by the inhabitants of communities, by living with them.
16. Although precise figures are not available, the organization's documents refer to approximately 3,000 young-adult literacy workers, and between 20,000 and 25,000 inhabitants of rural areas with whom they have lived and worked since these campaigns began in 1985. Since that time, they have worked in 97 communities in 11 Mexican states.
17. <http://www.adeco.org.mx/alfabetiza/index.php> (March 2, 2011).
18. In the last phase, they leave statistical, graphic and bibliographical testimonies resulting from the systematization of the knowledge acquired in the literacy campaigns. In this way the organization is attempting to assure that the consolidation of this work leads to the expansion of more groups dedicated to social and community work.
19. SEGOB. (2008). **Cuarta Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas**. Mexico: (<http://www.encup.gob.mx/?page=cuarta-encup>) (April 2, 2010).
20. Carles Feixa distinguishes between three perspectives in contemporary studies on youth: adult-centric, culture-centric and intergenerational. An important point to mention in reference to the latter is that the rules of the game are not presupposed, but are practiced in the context of interaction between generations. Feixa, C. (2010). *El Imperio de los Jóvenes*. In Alvarado and Vommaro (Comp.) (2010). *Jóvenes, cultura y política en América Latina: algunos trayectos de sus relaciones, experiencias y lecturas 1960-2000* (pp. 13-20). Argentina: CLACSO-Homo Sapiens.

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