

Chapter 2

Young People's Citizenship and Participation

2.1 Citizenship

The definition of citizenship has changed in the past decades. Sandoval Moya, (2003) defines it as a historic category with an empirical content that is in constant transformation depending on the historic period, and Somers (1997) said that it is not possible to consider citizenship as a natural category as it depends on public and inter-subjective relationships.

In this way, the notion of citizenship widely exceeds the right to vote. Quiroga states (1996, p. 154), quoting Alain, that democracy is not defined by the universal vote but is based on the power of control that citizens exert. In addition, Przerworski (1998, p. 61) declares that the difficulty that democracy faces lies in the fact that being a system of positive right, the conditions required for the effective exercise of those rights and obligations are not created spontaneously, and in order for all citizens to exercise their rights, the necessary social conditions need to be present.

In 1949, Marshall proposed a definition of citizenship comprising three types of rights obtained in a sequential way: civil rights, political rights and social rights. From this perspective, the classic model of citizenship established the recognition of subjectivity that is functional for the material needs and symbolic view of the new economy but makes invisible other forms of subjectivity. In fact, most of the citizen fights in the second part of the twentieth century can be understood as a group of efforts for extending the view of the subject of rights, including new forms of citizenship: gender and citizenship, rural citizenship, multicultural citizenship, and during the recent years, youth citizenship (Sandoval Moya 2003, pp. 34, 35).

Since the 1960s, various debates on citizenship have taken place and since the 1990s, two positions about it can be recognized: the Rawls (1996) proposition,

about a social agreement considering a minimum of distributive justice that protects individuals' rights trying to reach equality; and the other proposition supported by Walzer (1993), Taylor (1994) and some other authors, constructed not only with equality but with the respect for ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

Actually, and in conjunction with Castillo García (2007, p. 766), it is possible to recognize two visions of citizenship: one that is considered traditional, referring to the relations of the citizens with the State, the society and the rules of participation in public life, and the other, defined as "new citizenships", that emerges in relation to the process of globalization, the advance of technology, the migration movements, the intercultural processes and the social recoveries.

A citizen is one who deliberates with others, moves with others in a conjoint mode, assumes the protagonist role of his own life and participates in public affairs (Cortina 2003). Castillo Garcia (2007) states that the process of configuration of citizenship derives from the different ways in which people relate to each other and from the ways they construct their community life.

Benedicto and Moran (2003, pp. 47, 48) explain that the different processes of acquisition and transformation of citizenship take place in relation to the processes that configure the social life and vital trajectories of people, based on a dynamic and relational conception of citizenship in which social practices are at the center of the argumentation, considering the multidimensional character of citizenship formed by a number of elements whose specific relation defines its social dynamics in a certain group or social context and considering the necessity of regaining the centrality of the sociopolitical component of citizenship.

At this point, it is relevant to include some thoughts regarding the conception of politics, as Martínez Pineda (2006, p. 136) puts forward, from a constituent perspective, going beyond the current areas for its application, and understanding that it is not possible to restrict it only to certain actors, organizations or political forces formally legitimated. It is necessary to recover what Arendt (2005, p. 67) proposes when she recognizes that the concept of politics is sustained in the existence of action and plurality as the basic human conditions. Politics is subjective and is a field of inter-subjective relations of conflicts (Lechner 2002).

Finally, and if the owner of citizenship is a legal subject with rights and obligations, these rights can only be guaranteed in a political community and, in this sense, citizenship must be understood as the product of social relations and the practice of these rights in the public sphere, and not as personal attributes previously defined.

2.2 Young People's Citizenship

Benedicto (2002, p. 2) recognized two types of youth citizenship: delegate citizenship and citizenship in project. But clearly, none of them represents a whole citizenship. In the case of young people, the exercise of real citizenship is a

question related to the future (what they will be, not what they are) as they are not yet adults so they are not yet citizens.

The entire exercise on citizenship is not a problem that affects only young people, it affects other members of the community as well. Since the time the vote existed in Latin America, people have fought to obtain "effective citizenship", which is to say the existence of necessary social conditions that allowed the exercise of citizenship. We agree with Przerworski (1998, p. 68) when he questions the possibility of speaking about democracy in situations in which this type of citizenship does not exist.

Young people show their interest in public issues in a particular way, which might sometimes be mistakenly taken as a lack of interest on the subject. We will define "public issues" as a symbolic arena of collective deliberation and participation for citizens who care about issues of general interest that go beyond politics to include the social dimension (Quiroga 1996, p. 151). The domain of public issues consists of a formal domain (institutions) and an informal domain (civil society) as it allows communication among community members. It is also said that young people reject politics, when in fact their rejection is directed at the traditional political actors. Young people's participation is characterized today with a proximity to others, with clear claims in relation to their life that they do not express their demands through traditional institutions (Balardini 2000).

It is necessary to reevaluate the relationship between the State and citizens and to redefine public space as a scenario for social interaction. In this way, the participation of young people in public space presents specific characteristics as citizenship exercise is conditioned by social and governmental particularities in the Latin American context.

2.3 Young People's Participation

What are the actual ways in which young people participate in public life? Bendit (2000, p. 35) proposes three areas to study young people's political participation: the interest in politics, the confidence in political institutions and the active political participation.

Participation implies considering subjects as the protagonists of the decisions, so if we speak about acting conjointly, we are not speaking precisely about participation. Participation is more than acting together; it is about making decisions together. In this way we can recognize two types of participation: real participation and symbolic participation. Sirvent (2008, p. 122) states that real participation occurs when the members of a group (organization) take part effectively in all institutional processes and in the nature of decisions; whereas in symbolic participation people do not influence decisions. This kind of participation is one that makes people have the illusion of participation.

Real participation implies the democratization of knowledge and the redistribution of power to make the necessary changes in response to social needs.

Hart (1993, p. 6) pointed out that participation is the capacity to express decisions that are recognized in the social space and affects one's own life and community life, and noticed that the capacity to participate can be reached only gradually and with practice, because it cannot be taught in abstract.

In a qualitative study developed in Argentina during 2009–2010 on young people's participation we interviewed 20 young people, male and female who had a history of participation.¹

The objectives of the research were: to develop a study of citizen-community and political participation of young people's compromise with their own communities and to understand young people's perception about citizenship and their own participation in urban communities.

From the statements of the interviewed subjects three different expressions about participation could be identified: the political participation, the community participation and the civil participation. These imply the different concepts related among them.

First, the experience of politics appeared with the sense of freedom and, resembling Arendt (Birulés 2005), we will say that the Greek polis was the only place where the subjects could show who they were; and this came from the idea of plurality while being a constitutive element of the human condition. This plurality that Arendt was indicating is not identical to the simple alterity but is related to the distinction. From this perspective politics is not any social modality of life 'because the plurality of the human beings in a world that they constitute jointly is not assimilable to the homogeneous unit of the mankind' (Birulés 2005, p. 21).

So what distinguished human coexistence in the polis was freedom. According to Arendt (2005, p. 63) 'The sense of the politics is freedom'. The opinions of young people refer to politics as a tool of emancipation and as an instance of personal satisfaction, related to passion; with the idealist youth, it is the need for joining and working together, not giving a leading place to money as an element of satisfaction but indicating that working for the country is exciting and a reason for happiness. Likewise, it is held that everything is related to politics and that everything a subject does is political in some way.

Also, politics appears as a relationship, concurrent with Arendt (2005, p. 46), when she stated that 'politics arises in the between and is established as relation', which takes us to the memory of the polis and of the dialog that also appears in the statements of young people as an element of interaction.

Corruption is mentioned as a negative element. Sen (2000) states the guarantees of transparency, defined as the honesty that people can expect and the freedom to be interrelated with the guarantee of spreading information and clarity; these are the guarantees that fulfill a fundamental role in the prevention of corruption.

¹ Research project *Young people politic, community and citizen participation in Argentina*. Director Graciela Tonon, Department of Law and Political Science, Universidad Nacional de La Matanza. 2009–2010, Argentina.

Likewise, Gillman (2010) visualizes corruption as the factor that demotivates participation.

The recognition of belonging to a community not only contains a feeling of rooting, but also implies a feeling of responsibility and loyalty. The idea of citizenship is articulated from the recognition that members of the community have features that identify them and distinguish them from those who are not a part of it. The idea of community allows to visualize individuals as subjects and in this respect we are reminded of Lechner (2002), when he indicated that politics is also subjective and an inter-subjective field of conflict's relations. In this research, young people spoke about politics in terms of a psychological office, recognizing it as a space where people can be heard, and thereby appearing as the relation specifically of the partisan and arriving at the sphere of human relations of affective and social support.

As a positive indicator, it appears as the possibility of change and the vote as a concrete instrument to generate a project of a country. Gillman (2010) visualizes young men and women as agents of development, innovation and social change in Latin America. In agreement with this idea, in this research young people proposed the idea of voting with conscience and thinking about a project of the country, recognizing the possibility of change to the extent that one works in a collaborative way and indicating the need to do it in a systematic way instead of simply doing it once every often.

Finally, community participation appears first before the recognition of the existence of social need, and this reflection brings over the way of approaching them. Young people recognized that it is not the individual who has to go with armed solutions 'as a box of lights' to help people, but managing to find the way to solve the problem by departing from the reality of others.

Today, the participation of young men and women is characterized by their proximity in their meeting with others, according to Balardini (2000, p. 9) from face-to-face relations, where the product of the participation is visible and tangible, with punctual actions and concrete claims, from near relations all of which are not canalized by traditional organizations.

Young people centre their attention on joint work and on community participation, describing the democratic participation related to the local and to the immediate matter at hand. The voluntary action appears as Hopenhayn said (2004, p. 19): *it allows to involve a young person to be placed as protagonist and not like underprivileged person, as supplier and not as salesman, as hero and not as victim, as employee who starts on a very low salary and not as object of suspicion on the part of the adults.*

In their statements young people described the different activities they developed in the community area: civic voluntary work like help to neighbors, football matches as a way of integrating the members of the community, recognizing the need and importance of collective work recognizing that if it is not like that it would not have legitimacy. They indicated the need to produce actual results rather than spending time in eternal discussions that do not lead to anything, as some politicians do.

It can be recognized in this research two of the seven trends that Hopenhayn (2004) identified when he referred to the social and political participation of young people at present: the increasing importance acquired by new associative modalities of informal character and the participation in groups of voluntary work. The community participation appears in relation to the recognition of the existence of social needs and of the reflection it brings on the way of approaching them.

Considering what we explained, it can be said that on studying young people's participation we recognized two public spaces that facilitate the process of construction of citizenship: community and university. In this sense, authors like Castillo Garcia (2007) recognized that society and education are scenarios where young people develop their life and facilitate their construction as subjects.

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