

Changing Identities among Latin America's Youth

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Introduction

The juvenile period and the representation of youth are assigned different values in each society, socioeconomic strata and culture. Globalization has broken the uniformity of culture and, consequently, shattered the immobility of roles, methods of production, participation and expression. Identities have become more important, a fact that is evident even in national identities. In this context, policies must consider the diversity of actors and populations involved; being young increasingly becomes an identity in and of itself and it therefore needs to be taken into account in policies.

The new situation of youth stands out for the greater value assigned to individualization coupled with a weakening of predetermined identities, an eagerness to have more life experiences placing emphasis on intensity rather than on permanence and security. Economic independence is delayed and young people are less eager to achieve adulthood and, at the same time, there is an earlier onset of active sexuality marked by its openness and unsafe practices.

The world created by cyber space is part of a cultural change that enhances socioeconomic differences expressed in large a divide in the possibilities of access to technology. Furthermore, it brings in new codes, conditions and experiences to the process of identity development in youth. Information technology creates virtual realities that open up new routes for the development of identities and the view of the world. Interconnectivity has broadened spatiality and modified the concept of time; the need for face-to-face encounters for exchanges between individuals has decreased and at the same time facilitated their multiplication. This has an impact on social relations –both material and symbolic– allowing users to relate to multiple actors in different contexts.

Among the changes experienced by contemporary society, one factor that influences the development of identity is what Beck (1998) calls the risk society where people are exposed to socially produced dangers that surpass safety. Thus, at all levels, individuals are required to rely more heavily on their own resources than on institutions. For Bauman, modernity has become liquid and patterns and configurations are no longer predetermined nor self-evident (Bauman, 2004: p. 13).

All of this is linked to the new strategies employed by young people to deal with situations, given that each youth has to make a bigger individual effort than before in order to operate in a system of reference points in the world that surrounds them and develop a minimally stable identity in a world of

individualized lives. Increasing individualization began with modernity, when society evolved from an industrial cultural model to one of liquid modernity (or second modernity according to Beck). This calls for a cultural model of identity based on the principles of independence, flexibility and individual self-actualization (Beck-Gersheim, 1990, Bauman, 2004).

1. IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH

In youth, individuals must make their own individual synthesis of the models, identifications and ideals offered by society, which frequently are incompatible or contradictory. Identity development requires taking material from the identification with significant figures in childhood. Upon entering youth, the process of individualization and differentiation helps achieve a personal identity. Identity is lived as a basic experience of inner connection that coordinates the meaning of life, the recognition received, and the membership of individuals in a group and a society (Krauskopf, 1994).

Remus noted, as early as 1980, that a sense of personal identity can provide stability over time to individuals, somewhat independently of external factors and the ability to cope with the difficulties of life. This is particularly significant in 2010, a period in which our risk society is going through rapid changes, uncertainty about the future, and the need for individualization. However, stability is no longer perceived as it used to be in the past: holding a steady job, staying in the same place, having a permanent circle of social relations. Moreover, politics and the workplace now lack their previous strength in determining identity (Gamboa & Pincheira, 2009), and the self becomes the organizational core. Novaes & Vital (2006:107) point out that being young in a connected world is equal to living an unprecedented experience which is coupled with the local-global tension clearly manifested throughout the world.

Current modernity gives rise to complex societies (Melucci) where older generations and young people need to be in a state of constant preparation in addition to having a flexible approach to change. Uncertainty is an element that becomes part of development. Young people can no longer be considered a preliminary project for the future that is heading towards a safe and predefined horizon. The current ways of adults are not their target. The coordination of the sources of identity is based decreasingly on the linearity of development previously based on patriarchy (Krauskopf).

In contemporary societies, young people develop their identities not only through social reproduction and social projection. Rather, as Bajoit (...) holds, young people need to achieve individualization to allow them to manage and co-manage their own development and social integration. People must understand that their lives are subject to highly differing risks, a fact that has personal and global effects. **Individualization** thus means that the biography of human beings is severed from traditional models and forms of safety, from external controls and mores. Openly and as a task, life trajectories are the consequence of the actions and decisions made by each individual (Beck, 1998; Beck-Gersheim, 1990).

The **present** is also extolled and there is a loss of depth due to the exaltation of immediate impacts, intense experiences, rapidly changing styles, risky, innovative and fleeting adventures. The power of the image is important in social life and young people seek for looks to give them visibility in the invisibility of the city. The cultural practices of graffiti artists are a case in point: they have to act quickly, the action itself is very important, and their art is fleeting and transient. They have no guarantee of permanence but they manage to mark their presence and achieve prominence (Landa & Cruz, 2006). This is the eternal instant referred to by Maffesoli (...).

1.1. Social identities

Frequently, the synthesis of experiences and identifications is assigned a linearity that gives identity its coherence. This has led to a cropped view of social identities, almost as if they were independent of a specific set of circumstances and conditions. Youths are viewed as students, as guerrilla fighters or rebels, as drug addicts, as gang members or criminals. However, by recovering the value of the plural nature of each individual's social membership, the development of identity takes place in a broader spectrum and the tendency to make generalizations about any given social identity becomes relative. Martín Barbero says that, at present, the configuration of young people's identities is less marked by continuity than by amalgamation. (Barbero, 1998: 30).

Modernity has made it evident that identity is multicentric and its dimensions make sense in specific contexts, through processes of decentralization and articulation. **Social identities** result from the tension between idiosyncratic development and the dynamics of the situation. They can therefore be understood as an expression of the interaction between different components of identity that are articulated to be part of a given sociopersonal space which form the underpinning of the behavior and relationships between individuals and the community. (Krauskopf, 2007).

Several researchers have noted the multidimensional nature of social identities. In an analysis of the identities of indigenous youths, Xón (2003) specifies that identities include political, cultural and social aspects. Lungo (2003) highlights the diversity of interests of young people and the collective actions carried out among organized youths, which is even more apparent with the rise of economic, technological and cultural globalization.

Gómez (2003) notes that research studies on the identity of youth revolve around a decisive identity and says that it is important to understand that social identities are part of a more global way of operating. For example, consider the simplifications that are made when analyzing young people as part of a group, as in the so-called urban tribes.

Landa and Cruz emphasize that the dynamics of spatial-temporal contexts in which youth identities operate, leads them to search for new meanings and replace symbols and actions. This makes their coexistence possible without causing conflict. Thus, "flexible identities may very well be an outlet to

acknowledge youth as a larger continent than previously envisaged". (Landa y Cruz 2006:199).

It takes all the resources of flexibility, self-acceptance and a positive sense of life to handle obstacles and personal failures based on the different components of identity. When this does not happen, one of these components may become the individual's essential hallmark. This produces a rigid and partial continuous organization that is incapable of flexibly integrating other hallmarks; in this case we believe it is appropriate to speak of **partial social identities** (Krauskopf, 1994). Fundamentalist attitudes and other unilateral forms of identity development are examples of the above.

Disturbances affecting identity, social relations and behavior are not infrequent at present: "many individuals, disoriented by the speed and magnitude of changes no longer have a clear idea of who they are, what they want, or how to conduct their relations with others. (Bajoit, 2003: 120) Consumption is part of the repertoire to forget about the issue of meaning whereas violence is the resource used to deal with the lack of satisfactory behavioral resources.

In the development of young people who grow up in a state of exclusion, extended life expectancy is not an existential promise. Salazar (...) has identified the Culture of Death, where the distance between living and dying is shortened, as in the case of young hired killers¹ and gang members². Salazar considers that the silent violence of the young is due to their inability to articulate a discourse regarding the losses they experience. Landa and Cruz (2006:183) note that youths in situations of social and economic exclusion live outside the social and institutional frame of reference that provides a positive identity and inclusive membership.

The features of their identitarian expressions reflect the exclusion and moral contempt that surrounds them and also their anonymity as social actors. In order to develop, young people need a positive feeling of identity, for which they demand social recognition and they fight for their reputation. In its absence –particularly in situations of exclusion– they may seek negative social visibility. This is strengthened through group actions where they find their own identity in a shared self and are empowered through terrifying behaviors. (Krauskopf, 1996)

1.2. Social identities and youth participation today

Participation is not a clear-cut concept without its own history and dependence on other dimensions. Serna (1998) points out that juvenile actions seek to change the present based on autonomy and identity to derive social change from there. Respect for diversity and individuality becomes the focus of their practices. This implies that, in many of their organizations and social movements, they prefer spokespersons instead of representatives and they feel

¹ Many youths in Colombia, work as hired killers, commit crimes under hire, generally ordered by drug dealers

² The term developed in Central America, originally in Guatemala, to refer to juvenile gangs.

no affinity towards bureaucratic social structures based on hierarchy and representativeness.

On the one hand, we find that adults resist against accepting a major role in society for young people and an extension of their decision-making powers, and on the other hand, we have the resistance of young people, expressed in active segregation and distrust of institutions, when the weakness of their proposals for the actual integration of young people is obvious (Krauskopf, 2009). Accordingly, modern young people primarily seek to participate in an environment which is far removed from the state and public policies (CEPAL-OIJ, 2004). The disqualification of politics and politicians by youths is followed by a reappropriation of the idea of citizenship to which they transfer certain attributes pertaining to the political sphere, such as action, awareness raising, rights, appreciation of public spaces, and a search for solutions to problems (Novaes & Vital, 2006:118).

Youth networks want to act as a facilitating and not as a centralizing element. Many initiatives taken by young people's organizations state that they are in favor of more pluralism and against the criticism which is imposed on their life options. The ethical dimension of societal relations is a topic which motivates participation and is realized in particular in the mobilization of young people to fight corruption, social injustice, impunity and extreme injustice vis-à-vis groups, which are a target of discrimination. Young people give priority to immediate action and the tangible results of common and individual actions; in their own way, they are pragmatists linking the instrumental reasons for their actions to the creative use of resources for mobilization and participatory processes. At the same time, they criticize the lack of consistency in conventional politics (Serna 1998, CEPAL-OIJ, 2004).

Gamboa and Pincheira emphasize that struggles among youths are also esthetic: what emerges is not merely a slogan, raising awareness among the masses "but rather their entire corporality and their own staging come into play". Everyday life is political and, thus, new forms of action and new areas of influence develop. "In ethics (what for?) and in esthetics (how?) actions are a call to consistency and to a commitment that transmits goals and actions" (2009: 40;148)

Movements addressing new issues, new subjects, new types of sensitization, mobilization, and organization of young people coexist with traditional social associations. Young people have expressed their civic role through the arts, their culture and their various forms of expression and organization. They express their differences in terms of sexual orientation, tastes in music, religious, political, and sports groups, and other common interests. There are almost no traditional youth organizations (student unions, youth groups in political parties, Catholic and Protestant youth pastorals) that are not required to include an ecological item in their projects, programs and agendas (Novaes & Vital, 2006).

The globalization of the approach to rights contributes to the changes that have taken place in the contents of youth participation and citizenship. The civic

condition of youth is not only expressed by young people exercising their voting rights, which is interpreted as the traditional form of exercising citizenship. Exercising citizenship also enables the individual to transform from a mere recipient and passive human being into an executive and dynamic person in society. This is what young people call active citizenship. One expression of the legitimacy of this progress is the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Young People (2008), an innovative international instrument, which has been signed by almost all countries in Latin America and has so far been ratified by seven parliaments in the region.

The youth agenda has given new value to rural employment, tourism, sports, art, culture, access to recreation and other forms of leisure. Environmental, musical, sports and religious groups abound at present. Their actions are intended to transform local communities. Their organization is spread out to larger geographical areas to carry out their artistic and cultural exchanges, their experiences in social action and campaigns linked to the broader interests of citizens. Before dismissing them as merely artistic or welfare-oriented actions, more should be learned about their ways of acting in public in addition to paying attention to their political impact on social settings marked by exclusion and violence. (Novaes, 2006:118, 119)

2. YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Undoubtedly, social movements –particularly young people's social movements– have experienced major changes since the mid 1970s. At the time, social movements in Latin America took place in a setting where the guiding aim was the development of national or class models. Second modernity and its features contributed to the loss of effectiveness of these approaches. Thereafter, new social actors and new collective practices developed both within traditional social movements (i.e. workers and peasants) and in the development of new movements that did not go as far as proposing holistic actions or goals and which have been considered as segmented collective practices (Jelin & Calderón, 1987).

Young people of today are viewed as more disinterested in political and social issues than in previous generations. This conclusion is drawn by comparing an important segment of youth that gained visibility in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the authors who support this view on today's youth were part of such groups. Abramo (1998) notes that in the 1970s, participation included a strong contingent of young middle class students. However, statistically they do not represent the majority of the young people of the time. Thus, this view compares a minority from the past to all contemporary youths. An entirely different situation developed in connection with national revolutionary projects, as in the case of Nicaragua. Most young people joined in the social transformation actions that took place there and came to be called the "third force" in the country.

In the 1980s, Chilean youths were a fundamental element in efforts to overthrow the dictatorship. However, once this goal was achieved, their

participation in establishing democracy was displaced by the predominance of political figures who had already gained status in the pre-dictatorship society. At present, the social pattern of young people who take action is much more diversified and only a few are interested in joining political parties. Some new social movements have shifted the fields of tension from a focus on power in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical subsystems to installing their “battle fields” in the sociocultural subsystem. The goal is to fight against the excesses of modernity (De Souza Santos, Boaventura, 2007). Several of these movements occur among youths that come from very different social sectors, particularly the so-called urban poor.

In the 1960s and 1970s, being a student amounted to being predisposed to participating in the struggles of workers and peasants. Today, young people are becoming organized to claim **their own rights** to inclusion: at work, in education and other crucial spheres. Affirmative action has been an important way to deal with discrimination (ethnic, gender-based, sexual orientation, special needs). Many practices carried out by young people are micro-politics, but they have an effect on the social sphere (Novaes & Vital, 2006; Gamboa & Pincheira, 2009).

Venturo (1996) points out that, at present in Latin America instead of youth movements we are witnessing the development of youth action trends (“*movidas*”). They are neither institutionally nor politically centralized but they disseminate political and cultural contents. Rossana Reguillo (2000) recognizes youth movements in such activities. Their distinctive feature is that they draw young actors to public places to address a conflict and a disputed social goal.

We have seen that **mobilizations linked to current events** [*movilizaciones de coyuntura*] are an important short-term expression equal to social movements, where micro-political groups participate if and when their own goals are included. These demonstrations are frequently spasmodic, seeking to attract large groups, develop intense short-term actions and tangible results. They are tactical in nature and may involve alliances with several collectives, not limited to youth groups.

Gamboa and Pincheira (2009) note that there are groups pursuing different causes that operate silently, the bases of which would allow them to become part of mass social movements. These are the **young people’s collectives** (*colectivos juveniles*) characterized by Reguillo (2000) as having some degree of organizational capacity. Their project is determined by the organization of a micro-community that shares a similar view of the world. Some of their members’ actions could be viewed as volunteer work but their participants view themselves as **activists**, given that their forms of action are guided by the perspectives and goals of their group and are not intended to provide a service in a different framework.

Although they are based on traditional political organizational models (party youths, youth departments in labor unions and the student movement), they are also starting to introduce new issues and organization methods. Their approach to public policy development is linked to new issues, concepts and channels

that renew politics and open up possibilities for young people in collectives, organizations and –more recently– party youths³, to operate in that space (design youth policies, municipal offices for young people, laws pertaining to young people, youth government agencies). In all instances, these activities are marked by their access to cyber space. Youths organize themselves thus to have access to the digital world and influence government policies.

Policies currently under development in Latin America focus on the recognition of youth as an important force for the development of societies. This requires the integration of young people and their active exercise of civil rights into the approach taken on general issues as well as specific agendas. Public youth policy is directed towards promoting the participation of young people in the social, economic and political life of their countries. Civic participation is regarded as an element of strengthening local public governance in the new model of governability. There are attempts to regard young people not only as the recipients of services but as persons in their own right and strategic players of development. This issue is in contradiction to the old paradigms, still prevalent, that portrayed young people as still immature individuals and associated them with the widespread concept of youth as a problem group. (Krauskopf, 2009).

2.1. Between peace and violence

Being young in Latin America –particularly young and poor– is equal to being a suspect and youth is treated as such by the police, the media and other members of society. So it is striking that, in large cities, large numbers of middle class teenagers adopt the music, the esthetics, the way of dressing and the slang of depressed or disadvantaged areas (called “achorados”, “cuicos flaité”, etc.). This development has not been sufficiently studied. Novaes and Vital (2006) ask: Is this an esthetic identification with violence and crime? Is it a protest against social segmentation?

Gangs are a terrifying form of organizational empowerment that share a collective self (Krauskopf, 1996). It has been shown that certain interventions in some of these organizations can produce new protagonists and actors for new youth organizations dedicated to fighting police violence and freeing young people from drug trafficking (Novaes & Vital, 2006).

Small groups of young people develop based on anti-system ideas and they see themselves as anarchists. One of their last manifestations was in early February, during the International Day of Rebellion against Imprisonment, when they protested against the incarceration of prisoners in Mexico and the rest of the world. They sought the release of youths arrested in Mexico for burning cars and conducting other acts of violence. The group⁴ has a web site where they report on acts of sabotage such as the placement of explosive devices. In claiming the act, they said: “We achieved our goal: we attacked and outsmarted the safety and security promised by embassies”. In Chile they attacked the

³ Young people in political parties are not trusted by other youth groups but they are accepted when the act based simply on their identity as youths and do not attempt to co-opt others or exert power over them.

⁴ “Total Freedom” [Libertad Total]

Mexican Embassy and covered their faces with red and black hoods. In addition to acts of vandalism, they threw leaflets announcing “insurgent and international solidarity” (*La Tercera* newspaper, Friday, February 12, 2010, Chile).

Gaining the attention of the media is an important way of being in the public space. Making themselves known and establishing themselves as a reference point to disseminate a given issue may become the main objective of young people’s activities. The status of invisibility as social subjects in which young people find themselves and the feeling of belonging to a minority felt by the most heavily excluded groups, turn public displays into proof of existence, of social assertion and of “pulling power” to attract other youths. But acts of violence are the ones most likely to attract media attention. As one young woman said “... the press finds it difficult to view a peaceful demonstration as something that can have an impact. A demonstration is assumed to be tantamount to a commotion... they told us: hit it ...more, more, for the photo...” (Gamboa & Pincheira, 2009: 59-60).

Many forms of youth participation develop non-violent strategies to achieve presence in the public space. In countries that had dictatorships, denouncing acts have been based on ethics and esthetics which are called “escratches” in Argentina and “funas” in Chile. They usually target individuals responsible for human rights violations. The methods used are theatrical dramatizations and visual arts actions; they are considered a way to publicly denounce and condemn –in moral and social terms– individuals who escaped legal punishment.

2.2. Young people and political participation

Novaes and Vital (2006) identified the following traditional areas of political participation for youth in Latin America: high school and university student representation movements, political party youth groups, young people associated to rural and urban union organizations and movements, and groups of young socially engaged Christians.

As noted above, even the most traditional forms of participation show significant changes. “It is important to be aware of the historical involvement of youth in our societies...” The participation of youth ranges from traditional to modern movements” said a young participant in the Forum of the Collective of Latin American Young People.

Young people are increasingly identifying with youth issues and attaching value to being considered as citizens and valid representatives of the rule of law. This applies to young people in political parties in Panama who no longer emphasize their role as a generational change-over in each party and have joined other groups to draw up a youth agenda. The latter provided the contents of a pact signed by the candidates running for President prior to the presidential elections in the mid 1990s. They succeeded with the aid of United Nations representatives as witnesses. The ensuing enthusiasm led them to believe they could form a Federation of Political Youths but this did not materialize. The model was subsequently used in Argentina by the Youth Tables to have a

bearing on the pre-election period.

In the early stages of the Bachelet government, there was a strong and prolonged mobilization of secondary school students, demanding the repeal of the Education Act which was a remnant of the military dictatorship. They called for a new law consistent with real democratization for education. They brought to the forefront an issue that politicians had failed to address. Furthermore, since teenagers are regularly banned as social actors due to their age, they achieved public visibility and provided the basis for effective access to better education and a more egalitarian distribution of the opportunities to learn skills. These mobilizations led to a debate on the main features of public education and subsequently encouraged university students to join the movement and gave rise to the creation of alliances with teachers, parents and other societal sectors. The old law was repealed and a new one was adopted. It still falls short of students' demands, which remain dormant until future *movidas* take place. Some remarkable aspects of this movement were the striking spokespersons who headed the agreements in student assemblies and who represented the full range of political parties. This pattern is typical of youth movements and organizations that reject traditional forms of leadership and opt for a more horizontal approach in individualized collectives (Krauskopf, 2008).

Organized youth groups, movements and networks of public policies are highly characteristic of Latin America. For example, in the Dominican Republic youth collectives united when a Constitutional Reform was underway in 2009. They managed to introduce young people's rights in the Constitution. In cases such as these, the advance up to the point of being able to hold a dialogue with government. In other cases, this type of action may be promoted by government agencies. Both situations arise because of the belief that youth policies require participation so that they can permanently enrich and improve the process of renewal and therefore prevent a loss of validity. They seek to build their legitimacy through a common agenda that connects local groups with traditional juvenile organizations. In Peru, several groups joined in demanding the Youth Tithe from the Municipalities. This meant appointing 10 percent of young people as councilors. Given the success of this initiative, young people have organized to demand a Youth Tithe in Parliament. The initiative was also taken to international youth meetings.

The "youth" segment becomes a political actor in view of public power. Its contribution to the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and youth programs represents not only a tool for the promotion of participation but also a space for the integration of citizens in public affairs (Novaes & Vital, 2006; Krauskopf, 2009).

2.3. Young people and citizenship

There are numerous groups and networks that unite on the basis of specific identities. They focus on social inclusion movements. They believe that the boundaries between subjectivity and politics, between the cultural and political sphere are not that clear nor are they watertight. Young people also develop this type of approach and, in their own way, analyze their identity in accordance

with more far-reaching collective identities that suffer isolation and discrimination. Thus, in the gender perspective, "... young women do not speak of their double shifts (home and work), but of their triple shifts (school, home and work) (Novaes & Vital, 2006: 126).

Groups of youngsters that work to transform the local space in neighborhoods are also large in Latin American communities and their legitimacy has grown increasingly. A young Peruvian states that: "The process that has strengthened the participation of youth in areas for consensus and decision-making has had to go through several changes and receive support from some non-governmental organizations and the commitment of the young people themselves. We can now say that we have achieved the necessary credibility to be deemed, in a way, as strategic actors of Local Development". (San Martin Region, Peru. A participant in the Forum of the Collective of Latin American Young People.

Cultural groups that act in public spaces and institutions offer high visibility and appeal for young people. This is where one finds hip hop groups, graffitiists, cultural and performance groups, and communication groups. Hip hop –as practiced in the Americas– is gaining self-expression: "it is one of the most successful cases at present, in terms of channels of communication between young people from different countries and regions".

This is not an organic movement that produces homogenous groups: some groups only seek to develop their career as artists. There also are violent groups, even some financed by drug traffickers. In addition, there are groups with societal aspirations: some aim to replace violence with coexistence through music, dancing and graffiti.

Groups of young people organize campaigns on specific subjects such as: Hip hop against Smoking; Hip hop for Life without STDs-AIDS. Some groups have become well known in Brazil for their statements against drug trafficking and for their participation in pro-peace movements. This standpoint favors links between the hip hop movement and government bodies, non-governmental organizations and even churches. In the suburbs of big cities, hip hop became the cultural resource to attract young people into groups (Novaes & Vital, 2006:135).

Along with hip hop, graffiti are a social phenomenon that the participants themselves call "culture" or "movement". It can therefore be understood as a cultural expression and as a "spontaneous social movement". As one young female graffitiist said: "if there are protests or something is talked about, it's because something in the country is not working".

Groups that get together to mobilize globally and locally around a given cause or campaign are very well known. They focus on global issues (peace, the environment), regional problems (hunger, wars) and on national problems. Two examples illustrate the above: one is the presence of youth at the World Social Forum, where cyber space has been a key tool, and the other is an individualized strategy that is part of the environmental movement.

The Forum acts as a coordinating body; it does not encourage the aspiration of becoming a sphere to represent global civil society. The Forum covers a broad scope: it is highly diverse in terms of gender, ethnic groups, cultures and generations. Participation of youths aged 14 to 24 is high: in 2003 this group accounted for 37 percent of those enrolled. Also in 2003, at the International Youth Camp that is part of the Forum, 39.7 percent were Latin American and participation is on the rise. (Brazilian Institute of Socioeconomic Analysis).

As an example of specific strategies for individual management we have the case of an eco-friendly car⁵ that began a journey in Canada and ended up in Antarctica. This was an individual initiative that allowed other young people to spontaneously participate if they were interested in presenting themselves collectively through this form of expression. The initiator of the voyage was joined by other youths and the final participants included two Chileans, one Colombian, and one Costa Rican. The tour was funded by environmentalists. In each city, the young people talked with passers-by to explain the purpose of the campaign. They also met with several important figures in the different countries: the Minister for the Environment in Peru, the President of Ecuador, a popular Mexican actor known as "Chespirito" (*La Tercera* newspaper, February 12, 2010, Chile).

3. FINAL REMARKS

Societies are experiencing rapid processes that place young people in new circumstances and determine different subjectivities and practices. Many of the classical sequences of age and stages of development have stopped being irreversible. Globalization and increased life expectancy in modern times have modified the goal of a fixed and predetermined project, thereby adding greater meaning to the way young people join society and to their movements that have potential for innovation and flexibility. Being young becomes a reference point for actions and goals (and this also applies to adults!).

The new dimensions of time and space play different roles in the trajectories of youths, in their involvement. At the same time, they weaken predetermined identities. Flexible social identities and individualization, the globalization of rights, and management to achieve tangible goals, have a bearing on the features of the new youth movements. New technologies permit a redesign of the scale of information and the boundaries between the public and the private sphere.

Decentralized elements meet the thinking of youth groups showing their commitment to promote common actions in the socioeconomic, civic and cultural domain. On a local level, the ability of young people to influence events is increasingly noticeable, as evidenced by the existence of several youth collectives that interact with the local authorities.

⁵ A 1987 Volkswagen, equipped with two tanks – one for vegetable oil and another for diesel fuel– was conducted by a Latin American member of the Association for Free Flowing Rivers. [*Asociación de Ríos Libres*].

The more traditional conceptions of political culture arose in a setting in which the state took on major roles in society and, at the same time, operated according to paradigms that regarded youth as a generational change-over, a stage of preparation for future adults. Accordingly, the more traditional meaning of political participation (often seen as partisan involvement) undercuts the understanding of social participation by young people. To a large extent, this approach is responsible for interpretations that lead to the widespread concept of apathy and a focus on youth's aversion to politics.

Youth participation in politics is integrated into the quality of democracy: into the political system, the orientation towards social inclusion, cultural diversity, relations between genders, the existing channels for proposing initiatives, the modalities of institutionalization, the legitimization of social participation, the resolution of intergenerational gaps, the types and objectives of youth associations (Krauskopf, 2009).

In the past century, many social movements were geared towards developing national models. These views have been superseded by changes in the state, in modern society, the speed of social changes and their effects on inter-generational relationships, life, the course followed by individual lives and the hybridization of identities. The state must not regard itself as a unique and segregated political stage; society itself can design policies, as the values and principles of human coexistence must be determined in all social spaces (Beck, 2000).

Being young is an expanding condition, not only in terms of the number of years but also in the way that youth is viewed by society (CEPAL-OIJ, 2004). Identities no longer develop by postponing social insertion. Social participation thus becomes crucial for the young to develop their own identity.