

Reviews

Christian Alonso Fernández Huerta (2015). *Participación juvenil y agencia. Discursividades e interacciones en el escenario global*. Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. ISBN 978-607-607-259-2

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Issues involving youth have been, and continue to be, fields—in the sense of Bourdieu’s best concept—of intellectual, social, economic, and, particularly, political struggle. This stage in life entails major shifts in young people’s behavior and in the development of their potential as they are drawn toward ideologies that make them political and electoral capital. This reality brings to mind Salvador Allende’s assertion that “to be young and not revolutionary is a biological contradiction” (Allende, 1972).

Here, I take the liberty of reviewing an important text on this issue, which has been the focus of my academic endeavors in recent years. The book is *Participación juvenil y agencia. Discursividades e interacciones en el escenario global* [Youth Participation and Agency: Discursivities and Interactions on the Global Stage], by Christian Alonso Fernández Huerta. He provides an analysis of this stage in life, focusing on young people in Mexico, and the contents of the book are structured in a manner that is clear to the reader. Based on a doctoral thesis, it begins with an introduction that briefly explains the methodological tools on which the author draws to present his ideas.

Chapter one addresses a very contemporary topic, which is that of the complexity of connectivity and participation focused on young people and the virtual social networks that they participate in and help generate as “prosumers.”

Chapter two takes up another topic of great importance for this interconnected world in which we, the majority, inhabit the digital space and access that vast communication network, the Internet. This section of the book explains the transition from global to local and vice versa, and it proceeds to a discussion on young people’s participation in an interconnected world in which they define themselves as digital natives.

Finally, the conclusion explores the perspectives of young social actors and emphasizes that youth participation is meaningful in terms of the development of democracy in a democratic society. This issue is a central aspect of the thesis. Meanwhile, the author also highlights the agentic capacity of young actors toward virtual social networks.

In his summary and critique of the concepts addressed in the book, Fernández states his intention to examine whether youth participation consists solely of actions performed by young people or whether it includes those of others who are not young (in terms of age) but who share the spirit and ideals of youth dynamics. Hence, in chapter one, he describes participation using a broad perspective that includes various types of actions that are designed to have an impact on public interests, noting that two necessary conditions must exist for participation to occur: confluence and articulation. Confluence is understood as the encounter or concurrence of various elements; in the case of participation, it



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is varied and affected by a range of social actors with shared interests and agendas as well as collateral positions or visions regarding the same issue.

An interesting aspect of Fernández's work is its treatment of the concept of agency as explored by various authors, including Giddens, who states: "agency can be defined as the transformative capacity of the individual" (p. 57). This specificity alludes to the need to identify and explain the ways in which processes of youth participation are articulated at local and national levels as well as the need to examine their relationship to multilateral organizations at the global level. The author seeks to investigate scenarios in which agents interact and to objectivize youth participation, particularly the ways in which it is institutionalized.

Therefore, Fernández makes a point of attending the World Youth Conference in Guanajuato in 2010, a space in which a range of actors that are involved in different youth contexts with their different issues coincide and articulate within an institutional framework. From this space emerges an institutionalized youth agenda with participation by the state, government entities, global governance institutions, and young people from different independent contexts.

As the product of a research project, the book tackles a research problem concerning the processes of youth participation that are utilized by organized groups in their capacities as agents in the institutional framework of network building as well as the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in these processes. Hence, the author establishes the following premise: network building allows local-level processes of youth participation to be articulated with the youth agenda of international organizations at the global level. Along with the process of globalization and partly owing to ICT, new forms and issues of youth participation emerge, creating new modes of coexistence and participation or even citizenship. Fernández considers youth participation to be a political process, which is understood as meaningful action or behavior that is proposed and planned with a specific purpose or purposes. In this respect, his explanation of the methodological process is of vital importance, given that the book describes a completed research project.

In this section of the text, Fernández explains that he performed various methodological tasks to achieve his proposed objectives, including the following:

- 1) Reviewing documents published by international organizations and government agencies in Mexico, particularly those related to youth and citizen participation. One of the documents consulted was the World Programme of Action for Youth proposed by the United Nations;

- 2) Studying public policy in Mexico related to youth by reviewing the National Program for Youth for 2008-2012 and the relevant sections of the National Development Plan for 2007-2012; and

- 3) Performing fieldwork at the World Youth Conference in August 2010 in León, Guanajuato, including at the *Foro Dilo Bien* [Say it Right Forum], which was part of this conference. For this task, interviews with delegates from youth civil society organizations and Mexican representatives participating in these events were conducted. Meanwhile, 20 questionnaires were administered to representatives of Mexican youth civil society organizations geared toward promoting youth participation in various spaces and issue areas.

The author combines different methodologies and techniques such as documentary analysis, direct observation during events at the World Youth Conference, interviews with participants in the events, and questionnaires among youth organizations at the Conference.

In essence, the book is a meticulous work, as research projects ought to be, allowing the author to identify and explain how youth organizations—particularly, militant youth—participate in addressing the different problems that they face at the global and local levels.

I conclude this review with the words that Dr. Christian Alonso Fernández Huerta uses at the close of his book:

A young person who learns to be and do with others in the new platforms offered by social media is an individual with a greater ability to affect his or her surroundings and generate social capital. This can redefine his or her role in the public sphere and help build youth citizenship (p. 151).

Reference

Allende, S. (December 2, 1972). Speech at the Universidad de Guadalajara, México.