Urban socials movements and learning processes

Transformative citizenship learning

Coming from different contexts, these articles share the common focus of working with community groups. They aim at sharing knowledge that has a potential for triggering transformative action in urban areas. It is a timely initiative by Freirean Rhizome to dedicate an issue to the initiatives of urban social movements and their learning practices while their worldwide networks are preparing for the World Assembly of Inhabitants (The Madrid Declaration) which is scheduled to take place in Dakar (Senegal) in January 2011. The process leading to the World Assembly of Inhabitants is supported by more than 350 organisations in over 40 countries from all continents, linked to the Charter of WSF Principles[1] and to the San Salvador Charter as well as to the World Assembly of Inhabitants (Mexico, October 2000) and to the Citizens' World Assembly for World Solidarity and Responsibility (Lille, October 2001).

A crucial issue within such a process is how to narrate, to record and to make available locally and globally the transformative practices of urban movements. As the articles in this issue show, such narratives are also ways to reflect upon the decision making process and the choices that were made leading to transformative actions as well as the sources of legitimacy and the consequences of such choices. They help the reader in understanding the way urban movements operate and the way community groups can improve their actions by integrating in their practice these sources of learning from other experiences.

Such practices go beyond a merely legal concept of citizenship. They claim citizenship as a multi-dimensional, dynamic, contextual, and contested notion.

Its various dimensions include the focus on legal status and membership; the identity and belonging issue; civic attitudes, values and behaviours; and the actual agency dimension which is reflected in engagement, advocacy and practice.

As these articles show the dominant issues and meanings relating to the notion of citizenship change over time and depending on the local features, therefore making it a highly dynamic and contextual concept producing a diversity of claims and applications.

And from the urban social movements perspectives it surely remains a contested notion as they raise and expose a diversity of opinions and reactions concerning the legitimacy of the demands that different groups of citizens make.

In particular, these articles raise the issue of what type of factual and procedural knowledge is needed to allow for effective participation in decision making and in the wider political process, including ways to affect the actual political mechanisms and the mechanisms to influence decision makers (Schugurensky 2002).

Two articles are directly linked to the international activities of the Urban Popular University (UPU) of the International Alliance of Inhabitants (www.habitants.org). In “Producción de conocimientos, ¿cómo praxis de lucha política y social?”, Reynals, Crudi and Surian introduce UPU to the reader and present key principles and outcomes of the “knowledge co-production” methodology based on personal and collective narratives and developed at the University of Buenos Aires in partnership with community groups as applied in the first two UPU International Meetings “Construyendo la Universidad Popular Urbana en América Latina”, Buenos Aires (Argentina) in May 2006 and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), in April 2007. The article by Stefano Collizzolli refers to the latter event and address the methodological issues of the participatory video approach focusing on the video production process supported by UPU that took place in Santo Domingo. It is an example of the participatory video methodology developed by ZaLab (www.zalab.tv) through various international activities over the last years. The video featured in this issue is one example of the participatory video activities described in the article.
From a Freirean perspective the above mentioned activities could be framed as popular education and these perspective is made explicit by Jade Percassi in “Educação popular e movimentos populares: emancipação e mudança de cultura politica atraves de participação e autogestão”, produced in collaboration with the Centro de Estudo, Pesquisa e Ação em Educação Popular of the São Paulo University. The article highlights the lackness of specific literature about social movements and popular education.

Both this issue and the issue of the “rural” dimension within urban community practices are addressed by David Richards in “Pushing the Boundaries”. The article turns the focus of this issue from Latin America to both a global dimension and a local community in Reading (UK), sharing the results of projects such as “From the Margins to the Mainstream: making the global dimension sustainable”, trying to move beyond intensive input into a small network of schools, to reach out for policy

makers at local authority level by encouraging them to commit to taking responsibility for embedding and promoting Global Citizenship and the Global Dimension within their constituencies, changing the practice of schools and teachers, and “Growing Our Futures”: a green roof that involved Paul Barney, a local permaculture designer in order to plan sustainable human settlements through ecology and design.

A key feature of the practices described by these articles is their attempt to be “horizontal” activities, i.e. non hierarchical, these groups choose to operate in participatory ways having in mind long-term community sustainability. They show an awareness that such sustainability depends upon developing human and social capital, including surveying their own situation and taking grassroots initiatives, recognising that all people, regardless of their formal literacy and social condition, have a remarkable understanding of their surroundings and are capable of analysing and assessing their situation.

Bibliography

Schugurensky D. (2002) “Transformative learning and transformative politics”, in O’Sullivan E., Morrell A., O’Connor M.A., (eds.) “Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning”, pp. 59-76, Palgrave, New York.

Notes

[1] The World Social Forum Charter of Principles was finalised in 2001 just after the first WSF. It includes 14 principles that were adopted in São Paulo, on April 9, 2001, by the organizations that make up the World Social Forum Organizing Committee, and later approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001:

1. The World Social Forum is an **open meeting place** for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil

society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.

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2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that "**another world is possible**", it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which

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cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.

3. The World Social Forum is **a world process**. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.

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4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations interests, with the complicity of

national governments. They are designed to ensure that **globalization in solidarity** will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on

democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

5. The World Social Forum brings together and **interlinks** only organizations and

movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, **but it does not intend to be a body representing world civil society**.

6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World

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Social Forum as a body. No-one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on

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declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus **does not constitute a locus of power** to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to

constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.

7. Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forums meetings

must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to **circulate** such **decisions widely by the means at its disposal**,

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without directing, hierarchizing, censuring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.

8. The World Social Forum is a **plural, diversified, non-confessional,**

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non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.

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9. The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities,

providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be

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invited to participate in a personal capacity.

0. The World Social Forum is **opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and histor**y and to the use of violence as a means of social

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control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and

all subjection of one person by another.

1. As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is **a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the**

mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalization with its racist, sexist and

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environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.

2. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and **mutual**

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recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and

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for future generations.

3. 13. As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and **create new national and international links among organizations and movements of society**, that – in

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both public and private life – will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these

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movements and organizations.

4. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking **active**

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participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.

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