

Urban social 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 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 (Shugurensky 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 política através 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.

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

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.

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

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

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,**

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,**

**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.**

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

invited to
participate in a
personal capacity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**

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.