

## PRESENTATION

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Since the 1960s, the concept of empowerment has become customary in the political agenda of governments and in many projects and programs in the field of social science. Even though the term was conceived previously, its dissemination began with social action in USA and its decisive incidence in community psychology, also with the use of the word by international agencies as UN, UNESCO and the World Bank and finally with its recurrence in public policy debate and programs, from both Left and Right (Lladó, 2016).

The feminist movement is the area where this concept has achieved greater success and diffusion, managing to ensure its inclusion in official UN documents, as the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which was called "An agenda for women's empowerment". Years later, in 2000, "promoting gender equality and women empowerment" was proposed for the Millenium Development Goals.

Also the black community, demanding political representation, and popular educational movements, mainly linked to the Latin American context, have been pioneers in the use, appreciation and spread of the term. Likewise, the field of public health explicitly uses this concept as well, especially since the Fourth International Conference on Health Promotion in Jakarta, 1997. This conference identifies five strategies to encourage health promotion in the XXI century which were confirmed in 1998 by the resolution on

the promotion of health by the WHO World Health Assembly. One of them is specifically "to increase community capacity and "empower" the individual". Since this moment, the WHO expresses the need for empowerment processes in order to promote health. The existence of a process of empowerment for individuals and communities is considered to be an indicator to determine whether an intervention promotes health (Davies & Macdonald, 1998).

Youth, as a social group, has not participated in vindicatory movements such as the aforementioned; however, there are international institutions that are currently highlighting their lack of rights and need of an increased participation in all spheres of life.

According the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), young people around the world face several challenges regarding equality of opportunities to obtain a job and get involved in the decision-making processes affecting their lives. The information provided (United Nations Development Programme, 2014) shows the extent of this situation: young people are more likely than adults to be working poors; around 152 million young workers live under the poverty threshold (\$1,25 per day); it is estimated that 780.000 individuals between 15 and 24 years old became infected with HIV during 2012; around 75 million out of 232 million of international migrants are under 29 years old; political leadership positions

are hardly occupied by people under 35; electoral participation of individuals in the age range between 18 and 25 is lower than in others and young people are less prone to join a political party.

It emerges that youth demand a meaningful civic, economic, social and political participation. For that reason the UNDP develops the *Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* in order to address youth empowerment with youth participation and modify this situation.

Young people are -or should be- full citizens. They require action from all public policies. Thus, an integral action plan is the only way to properly tackle youth. Youth policies have then the purpose to articulate this transversal work and ensure the fair recognition of all their rights and, what is even more difficult, actually make young individuals exert and put them into practice. It is not only a matter of official recognition of youth rights, but also a matter of an actual exercise, experience and development in practice. In this sense, young people need in many cases a special attention due to diverse and changing factors linked to youth itself. This specific attention is what justifies youth policies and plans and programs focused on youth.

Attention on youth needs, despite being an essential aspect in social policy, often ends up in areas and positions which are not consistent with the importance and prominence that these policies deserve as a whole. This situation has been placed in doubt in the financial and economic crisis suffered mainly over the past decade. The regressive effect has become evident in all social policies, but particularly in policies addressing youth (Soler, Planas, & Feixa, 2014). Young men and women become one of the social groups more severely hit due to crisis as youth policies have been shrinking their programs, services and resources.

Focusing on the European context, in the past few years youth empowerment has been one of the goals of the EU and the specific programs that its institutions have developed. By way of example, we can mention the document drafted by the Commission of the European Communities on 27 April 2009, titled "An EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities", as the base for the new youth program planned to be implemented in the next years replacing the former program "Youth in action", which ended in 2009. This text stated that there was a need to increase coordination in order to deal with the challenges that young people face. It revealed the consensus to adopt a reinforced transversal approach, according to the suggestion

made by European Parliament in a statement in 2008 on youth empowerment. Likewise, structured dialogue should be better planned and ease the relations with young people who do not belong to organizations, especially those with fewer opportunities. Empowerment becomes an essential concept in this new scenario.

The European Union Youth Strategy, agreed by the Ministers of the European Union, establishes a cooperation framework for the period 2010-2018 without prejudice of general responsibility of member states of this field. Cooperation among member states regarding youth policy is based on a system called "open method of coordination": the aim is to establish a common agenda, exchange best practices and improve the database for policy making. The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (EYCS) brings together ministers twice a year. Since the current EU strategy for youth entered into force in 2010, the trio presidency focused on different priorities, and, from July 2014 to December 2015, youth empowerment was among them. Regarding this purpose, the 28 ministers or highest executives responsible for youth policies in the EU gathered on 18 May 2015 to debate on "Empowering young people for political participation in the democratic life in Europe" and hold a conference on EU youth, in which youth representatives and policy-makers within this field submitted proposals to deal with the problems that youth face currently. The debate, organized by the European Youth Portal and the Presidency of Latvia, was part of the process of "structured dialogue", a tool promoted by the EU to get to know opinions of young people and conducting them directly to senior authorities of the Member States.

One of the expected impacts whereby the *EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018)* is assessed is precisely to what extent has "More young people empowered as active, economically and socially integrated citizens" (European Commission, 2016: 5) been achieved.

Despite this profusion of youth empowerment, the concept remains controversial due to its complexity and imprecise boundaries. There is no consensus on its specific meaning among researchers (Wagaman, 2011; Hennink, Kiiti, Pillinger & Jayakaran, 2012) and, according to Bacqué and Biewener (2013), it is not clear whether its internationalization is paying the price of the domestication of the notion and the neutralization of its radical scope.

In the present monographic issue we will tackle this complexity in order to contribute to the interpretation of the scope of the term from the perspective of Social Pedagogy, as well as to

offer some information and reflections illustrating and pointing out its importance and possibilities. The majority of the material included in the monographic section (seven articles) is nourished by the research project *Proyecto HEBE. El empoderamiento de los jóvenes: análisis de los momentos, espacios y procesos que contribuyen al empoderamiento juvenil*. (HEBE Project: Youth empowerment: analysis of moments, spaces and processes contributing to youth empowerment), project financed by MINECO (Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness) - Programa Estatal de I+D+I Retos de la Sociedad 2013 (R & D Government program Society Challenges 2013). Ref.: EDU2013-42979-R. This section also brings two international contributions.

The first article presents a proposal for a pedagogical model to accurately classify and study the spaces, moments and processes of youth empowerment. This proposal approximates to a cartographic map that enables the description, explanation, interpretation, plan and guidance of every practice of youth empowerment. For that purpose, the article offers an original definition of youth empowerment which has its roots on the capability approach by M. Nussbaum. This definition of empowerment will be the reference framework for some of the following articles in this issue.

The second article, written by Finnish authors Ryyänen and Nivala, discuss the use of the term "empowerment" from the perspective of social pedagogy. They analyse how empowerment and emancipation interrelate in the field of pedagogy in Finland, both terms considered as theoretical conceptions in social pedagogical work and as guiding principles of social educational practices. Their contribution emphasizes the need to take into account different paradigms and traditions of social pedagogy, in order to give them a context. In this case, its contextualization and social pedagogy tradition in Finland allow us to analyse the diversity of meanings attributed to the term and to understand how, from critical social pedagogy in this country, the concept of emancipation is more common and implies a direct link with their own social pedagogy traditions.

The following article is the result of a quantitative research of a sample of 890 young individuals in order to gather rigorous information about, according to them, which spaces and moments are considered to develop their capacities to act autonomously and which spaces and moments have contributed to the development of those capacities. The work carried out identifies experiences that young people consider highly empowering and correlates empowerment with different life stages of young individuals.

The fourth contribution tackles youth empowerment through four processes of participatory evaluation, with a total amount of 42 young individuals from four Spanish cities. The article contextualizes the cases, presents the methodology used in the development of the participatory evaluation and offers the main results of each case. The results provided help to know the interpretations of the concept made by young people and the indicators that, according to them, attribute more sense and value. The article is connected to the next one, which studies the voice of youth starting from the analyses of six life stories where the selection process of rapporteurs and the narrative process are detailed, and the most relevant results regarding moments, spaces and processes identified are presented. The contributions of the young people and the analysis and selection of the contents made by the researchers are integrated and based on a close look of each story, but also correlating and triangulating the information provided by the different rapporteurs.

To conclude, there are two articles more in this section interrelating youth empowerment with art as a strategy or an empowering resource, through a interactive web documentary in the first case, and through performing arts the second one. One of the products elaborated by the Project HEBE was the creation and dissemination of a webdoc as an interactive documentary resource about youth empowerment. The article by Salvadó, Jiménez-Morales and Sourdis exposes the creation process of this webdoc starting from the material provided by a group of young people and created ad hoc in order to make them subject and object of the investigation. The purpose was to gather in a single interactive platform empowerment stories conceived as audiovisual material, reflections on the creation process through different focus groups and, finally, the possibility to digitally share these audiovisuals in order to make them dialogue with the community. The article presents the different stages taken and analyzes the experience carried out as participatory methodology for youth empowerment.

The monographic section ends with the contribution from USA. In this last article Delgado y Humm-Delgado explore how can empowerment be implemented in disabled youth groups, as well as in others marginalized due to race, gender identity or expression or socio-economic class. The performing arts are used to illustrate a form of participation, inclusion and empowerment with youth, and are considered an optimal solution to empower them, expressing their stories and achieving positive social change at the same time that they experience personal development.

We hope that the following pages meet our target providing elements for consideration for every educational intervention aimed at youth and, as

far as possible, being guidance for help in the challenge of empowering youth.

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