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Graciela Tonon

# Young People's Quality of Life and Construction of Citizenship



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# Young People's Quality of Life and Construction of Citizenship

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# Preface

This book is a systematized reflection on the research projects studying quality of life that I developed since 2002 in different universities of my country, Argentina.

In 2000, I joined the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) and since then I have been studying quality of life. Till date, I have developed different types of studies: quantitative and qualitative; I studied quality of life with adult people and young people, community quality of life and labor quality of life, as well.

I am grateful, first of all to the academics who introduced me to the “Quality of Life world”. My first teacher, Ferrán Casas, who invited me to participate in the ISQOLS International Conference in Girona 2000; Alex Michalos, who read the first manuscript of this book, gave me his wise suggestions and invited me to participate in the *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life Research* and in the *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research*; Bob Cummins, who gave me the opportunity to make the translation of the *WBI* and use it for the first time in my country and be a member of *The International Well-being Group*; Richard Estes, who first invited me to become a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life* and who sent me his papers which I studied; Joe Sirgy, from whom I learned a lot reading his works about satisfaction with community life, and finally Paul Anand, who invited me to participate in the *Capabilities Measurement Project*, which he leads in the Open University, UK.

Special thanks to the authorities of the universities where I work in Argentina: Franco Lavolpe, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora; Alejandro Castro Solano, Director of the Doctoral Psychology Program of Universidad de Palermo; Santiago Aragon, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora and Alejandro Finocchiaro, who was Dean of the Department of Law and Political Science in the Universidad Nacional de la Matanza; they are real friends who support my challenges.

I would also like to thank my friend Filomena Maggino who gave her comments on this book and supported me when I developed my post doctoral studies in the Università degli studi di Firenze in Italy some years ago.

Thanks very much to the researchers who worked with me during all these years: Lía Rodríguez de la Vega, Miguel Meza, Virginia Aguirre, María de los Angeles Aguilera, Fernando Fabris and Sebastián Rinaldi and especially to Silvana Savio who helped me with the final version of the book.

And of course I am grateful to the people who participated in the interviews and questionnaires, without whose answers I could never have written this book.

As with all the things I do in my life, this book is dedicated to my son Pedro and daughter Erica who give me love everyday, and especially to my husband Walter, without whose support, comprehension and love I cannot do the things I do to develop myself and my profession; thank you very much for making my dreams come true each day I live.

October, 2011

Graciela Tonon

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# Introduction

Young people do not form an homogenous group and, in this sense, it is not possible to generalize about youth. The concept of youth is a social construction built conjointly by all members of society in the historical moment in which they live. As a social group, young people interact with the environment in which they live and they are a product of the history they happen to live. In this way, they walk different vital scenarios in daily life that affect their quality of life.

Studies about quality of life bring us the possibility of a new theory that emphasizes people potentialities rather than weaknesses from a psychological, social and community point of view that include a political analysis (Tonon, 2003). In the case of young people quality of life, it is necessary to consider that the social context in which they live is formed by attitudinal, psychological and material elements of the society in which their lives develop.

This book is dedicated to analyzing the relations between quality of life and construction of citizenship of young people considering two specific social scenarios: community and university. In the case of community, it is important to note that it does not imply uniformity, as community means the inclusion of diversity and the achievement of sharing within it, and in the case of university, it will be necessary to recognize that as an educational institution the university has expanded its traditional role of the production and reproduction of knowledge, to become an institution of social reference for students and teachers.

In order to do this, the author reviewed her own research work carried out during the last decade, using quantitative and qualitative methods, dedicated to studying quality of life in the Argentina population, especially in young people that live in the Great Buenos Aires area.

Finally the book presents the importance of using qualitative methods for studying quality of life, as this methodological strategy is characterized by the construction of empirical evidence and theorization in an interactive process and allows the discovery and description of people own perceptions, opinions, feelings, ideas and interpretations.

# Chapter 1

## Young People's Quality of Life

### 1.1 Youth as a Social Construction

The complex concept of “youth” is difficult to define. If we look through history we recognize different views about youth: youth as a demographic category, youth as a period of the life or youth as a cultural expression.

The social representations, about youth that each population has in each historical moment, are embedded in the social context in which young people live and develop, conditioning everyday life and/or creating related stereotypes; in this way, the concept of youth is a social construction built conjointly by all members of society in the historical moment in which they live.

Young people do not form an homogenous group and, in this sense, it is not possible to generalize about youth. They interact with the environment in which they live and are a product of the history they happen to live. Authors like Urresti (2000) define youth from a point of view that takes into account the living together of different generations in different societies, thus being impossible to compare young people of today with those of two or three decades ago; in addition, he states that it is necessary to situate the understanding of youth within the historical and social moment in which they happen to live.

Krauskopf (2000, p. 125) considers this phenomenon as the existence of two generations preparing simultaneously, defining generation as a group of people born at a historic period, who are exposed to the same social, political and economic forces that make them all members of this group (generation). This definition implies the consideration of contemporariness as a requirement for the generations. In this way contemporariness is considered much more than simple chronological information; it means the existence of similar influences.

Nowadays, the predominant adult model is based on individualism. Thus, it is difficult for young people to achieve an intergenerational dialog, even when necessary.

Young people live in uncertainty, with a limited perspective for future action assigning their own meaning to events and facts, according to their fundamental concerns that are significantly different from those of their parents' generation. A considerable number of parents show rigid adult positions that prove to be ineffective in relation to young people, expressing this way their impossibility to understand what their children feel and avoiding to look introspectively to find within themselves and their own previous actions the sustainable answers.

On the other side, the process of globalization and the main social role of the new informational and communicational technologies increase the possibilities of expanding individual freedoms (Lechner 2002), but the fact is that not all young people are able to enjoy it.

Thus, we propose to recognize young people based on their equal dignity because "recognition is not only a courtesy that we owe others: it is an essential human need" (Taylor 1994, p. 46). This recognition is based on human dignity and tends to protect the basic rights of people as individuals and to recognize the particular needs of people as members of specific cultural groups (Gutmann 1993, p. 20).

## 1.2 Social Needs, Social Welfare and Human Capabilities

In the 1970s, Bradshaw (1972) classified needs into four types: the normative ones (determined by experts and professionals), the comparative ones (based on the insufficiency of resources for a particular group), the expressed ones (enunciated by the subjects in relation to their satisfaction) and the felt ones (not expressed by the subjects or articulated in such a form that it does not allow accessibility to their satisfaction). The importance of the classification of Bradshaw takes root in that the same one has been used in the decision of public policies, based on the idea that a need is more genuine when it has been identified according to the several types that the author has proposed. Nevertheless, and provided that Bradshaw's typology does not propose a theory about human needs, its utilization is difficult when trying to compare populations which present different socio-cultural characteristics.

In the Latin-American context, the theory of *Human scale development* proposed by Max Neef et al. (1986) must be mentioned. These authors understand that needs are not only the lack of something but also the potential that they imply as well. Likewise, needs have a social-universal character and what changes in accordance to the historical construction are called satisfactors, defined by the authors as "the ways of being, of having, of making and being, of individual and collective character, conducive to the update of needs" (Max Neef et al. 1986, p. 41). Provided that, speaking about a direct relation between needs and economic goods tends to the construction of objective information, the incorporation of the concept satisfactor is conceived as a cultural construction and as part of considering the subjective aspect in the economic process.

This proposal rests on the theory of people's protagonist as subjects of development and not as objects of the same one, respecting autonomy and diversity. Considering that development refers to people and not to objects, the best process of development will be the one that allows raising people's quality of life, depending on the possibilities that they have to adequately satisfy their fundamental needs.

Now traditionally social wellbeing has been defined in relation to the satisfaction of the individual and the multi-personal needs, whose diagnosis has been characterized by the appraisal of external reality (visible), the fact of departing from "minimums", that is to say from indispensable considerations and the utilization of quantitative measures tending to the search of the so-called "objectivity" (Casas 1996). What has happened then is that the delimiting of these needs has been based traditionally on the opinion of the experts who study them, more than in the perception and opinion of the citizens who live through them (Tonon 2008).

Sen (2000, pp. 94, 95) on having spoken about wellbeing marks a difference between the royal revenue and the "well-being freedom" from which it is extracted. It bears in mind, likewise, the particularities of every subject, the diversity related to the environment in which the citizens live, the differences of social atmosphere, the differences between the relational perspectives that depend on the conventions and customs of every community and the differences in family life. From this we can synthesize that the important thing, for the author, is to consider freedoms that generate goods, more than the goods on themselves.

In Sen's conception, people are considered to be agents "in the most ancient—and high—sense of the person who operates and provokes changes and which achievements could be judged depending on his own values and aims, independently of that we evaluate or not also depending on some external criteria" (Sen 2000, p. 35). These agents have capabilities defined as the royal skills of a person to achieve valuable performances as part of life (Sen 2000, p. 350), reflecting alternative combinations of the performances that a person can achieve and being the performances the representation of the things that a person achieves to make or to be on having lived. And it is in this respect that the author refers to the role of agency of the subject as member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political activities (Sen 2000, p. 36).

This theoretical proposal differs from the utilitarian evaluation traditionally used to study well-being, since it considers a variety of acts and human conditions important in themselves and not only related to some usefulness. This approach considers the relevance of the differences in the satisfaction of the needs people have, and centers the attention in the fact that the same ones may need different resources to reach the development of the same freedoms. That is why the person operates and provokes changes, whose achievements can be evaluated depending on his own values and aims, independent from those who could be evaluated by external criteria.

Sen (2000) indicates that his conception of freedom contains the processes that make possible the freedom of action and decision as the royal opportunities that

subjects have given their personal and social circumstances. He identifies the systems of education and health that every society has as social opportunities.

Speaking about human capabilities Sen (2000) and Anand and Hunter (2004) said that it is the opportunity to live a good life, rather than the accumulation of resources that matters most for well-being; so, opportunities result from the capabilities that people have. Sen (2000) framework for evaluating social states in terms of human wellbeing considers the importance of freedom of choice, individual heterogeneity and multi-dimensional nature of welfare. The human capabilities are construed in terms of the substantive freedoms that people have reason to value, instead of utility or access to resources. It emphasizes not only on how human beings actually function but also on their having the capability, which is a practical choice, to function in important ways if they wish so.

### 1.3 Quality of Life

The study of quality of life refers to the material environment (social welfare) and psychosocial environment (wellbeing). Michalos defines quality of life or wellbeing of an individual or community as "...a function of the actual conditions of that life and what an individual or community makes of those conditions. What a person or community makes of those conditions is in turn a function of how the conditions are perceived, what is thought and felt about those conditions, what is done and, finally, what consequences follow from all these inputs" (Michalos 2007, p. 4).

Michalos (2007, pp. 346–347) said that there are two different sorts of things people want to refer to when using the phrase quality of life. First one might want to refer to sorts, types or kinds of things rather than to mere quantities of things; in this sense, one may say that it and the phrase in which it occurs is intended to be primarily descriptive. On second place, one might want to refer to the value or worth of things by using the term quality in the phrase quality of life and when it is used in this sense, one may say that it and the phrase in which it occurs is intended to be primarily evaluative.

Quality of life has been defined as a concept that implies the objective and subjective dimension by Cummins (1997) who first studied the seven domains. The use of domains in the study of quality of life allows a more precise measurement than the one that could have been reached through simple questions, since psychometric scales are used, and if the addition of domains is equivalent to the totality of life satisfaction, then the group of domains is a valid measure of quality of life.

In 2000, Cummins and Cahill reviewed the literature about quality of life finding some agreements among researchers: quality of life is multidimensional; its study considers subjective and objective dimensions and is culturally defined particularly in its objective form and the construct of quality of life must be equally applicable to all people under all circumstances (Bramston 2002).

The QOL is conditioned by the social structure and culture of the community. The social structure may be considered in terms of the demographic characteristics, the institutional composition, the culture patterns and the social psychological milieu of the community/society (Ferris 2006, p. 118).

As Gullone and Cummins pointed out (2002, p. 6) the effects of changed life circumstances on well being are perceived very differently by people who have experienced the change and others who are passive observers, as people evaluate their circumstances differently depending on their expectations, values and previous experiences (Bramston 2002, p. 48). The particular perspective of each individual mediates the effect of social relationships and how they relate to the environment, that is, the way in which each subject interprets the context and situation; that is why the particular perspective of each individual is the key that determines quality of life (Patrick et al. 2002, p. 8).

In the case of young people, it has been observed that even if they live in negative physical, social and contextual conditions, they can nevertheless experience a relatively positive experience in relation to their quality of life, depending on the strategies and capabilities that they generate in relation to the context. Similarly, young people who live in favorable socioeconomic conditions and with a trouble-free psychological situation may experience a relatively poor evaluation of their position in life (Patrick et al. 2002, p. 7).

## 1.4 Characteristics of Young People Quality of Life

We began studying quality of life in 2002 using quantitative methods, but we developed the first research with young people in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this research was to study young people quality of life using the well-being index (WBI) with people from 16 to 19 years old, male and female, living in South Great Buenos Aires<sup>2</sup> area.

The well-being index has two scales: the personal well-being index (PWI) and the national well-being index (NWI) that ranges from 0 to 10, in which “0” represents totally dissatisfied and “10” represents totally satisfied. The personal well-being index was created from the Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale (ComQol; Cummins et al. 1994). The ComQol comprised both an objective and

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<sup>1</sup> *Quality of life of young people that live in South Great Buenos Aires*. Director Dra. Graciela Tonon. Research Program on Quality of Life. Faculty of Social Sciences. Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora (2005–2006).

<sup>2</sup> The Departments of Great Buenos Aires is the geographical region that surrounds the capital district. Its size is 3,833 km<sup>2</sup> and it is organized in 24 departments. The most recent national census (2010) showed that its population is about 9.916.715 inhabitants, which is the equivalent to the fourth part of the total country population that raises to 40.117.096 inhabitants. It is a region that presents polarized life conditions, ranging from settlements of extreme poverty to high-income gated neighborhoods.

subjective measure of life quality and its domains were initially identified through a review of domain names used in the literature. This was subsequently followed by a three-phase process (Cummins et al. 1994) and an empirical validation to generate the seven broad domains that comprised the scale (Cummins 1997). The PWI scale contains eight items of satisfaction, each one corresponding to a quality of life domain as: standard of living, health, achievement in life, relationships, safety, community-connectedness, future safety and spirituality/religion. These eight domains are theoretically embedded, as representing the first level deconstruction of the global question: 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?' (PWI-A Manual 2006). The national well-being index reflects nearly the same domains in the national context (NWI).

As the instrument was constructed for one context and applied in a new one, it was first necessary to produce its adaptation,<sup>3</sup> trying not to lose the original intentions during the process. It was needed to take very special attention to the symbolic universe of people because the difficulty that mostly appears when using an instrument constructed for one context and used in another one is based on the different interpretation people grant to concepts and not only on the literal translation.

In this study, young people's level of satisfaction with life as a whole was 7.2 and 5.2 with quality of life in the country.

In the PWI, the highest medium values were: satisfaction with friends (8.6), satisfaction with health (8.03) satisfaction with personal relations (8.01) and satisfaction with family relations (7.5). Other interesting results are satisfaction with being part of the community (6.04) and satisfaction with spirituality-religiosity (5.9).

The NWI showed low levels of satisfaction: with government (4.4), with the possibility to do business in the country (4.5), with the economic situation (3.8), with social conditions (3.8) and with public safety (3.6). These results are better than the ones obtained in previous studies (Tonon 2003) with the application of the same instrument. This reflected that the political changes produced since 2003 with the change of the national government made people increase the level of satisfaction with their lives as a whole and with the different domains of their lives. The Cronbach alpha was 0, 88.

During 2007, we developed another quantitative research about social inequalities and social opportunities<sup>4</sup> that included specific questions about quality of life to 976 people who lived in different parts of the country.

In this sample, 114 subjects were young people aged from 18 to 24 years old, male and female, who lived in Great Buenos Aires area. The questionnaire used measured human capabilities and it was constructed by Anand<sup>5</sup> et al.,

<sup>3</sup> The first translation of the WBI in Argentina was produced by Tonon and Aguirre (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Tonon, G. (Director). *Real opportunities and human capabilities of argentine population*. Department of Law and Political Science. Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, Argentina (2007–2008).

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Paul Anand is the Director of the *Capabilities Measurement Project* at the Open University, UK.

The questionnaire was first translated and adapted<sup>6</sup> to the local context. It was organized in different dimensions: satisfaction with life as a whole, family, work, health, house, leisure, religiosity, social support, personal safety, neighborhood safety, perception of oneself, possibility of expression of politic and religious ideas and discrimination.

The particular indicators about national context included by Tonon (2006) were: access to health, satisfaction with public and private health system, access to education, access to job, type of job, governmental social plans and citizens' attitudes in relation to votes.

The more significant results in relation to quality of life were the dimensions: level of satisfaction with life as a whole, health and access to health system, public insecurity in daily life and access to jobs.

Life satisfaction represents a report about how people consider their life overall (Diener 2006), as at a definite point of time or as an evaluation that comprises the development of their life as from the time of birth. Life-satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole; in other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads (Veenhoven 1996, p. 6).

Appraisals of life can concern different periods of time: how life has been, how it is now and how it will probably be in the future and these evaluations do not necessarily coincide. The evaluation of present life is not the same as the way one feels at the moment; and the period identified as present is not equally long for all people (Veenhoven 1996, p. 6).

Cummins (2005, p. 1) said that questions must be asked on certain domains so as to obtain a more specific evaluation of the situation because the question about life satisfaction in general, as in this case, leads young people to connect themselves basically with the feeling of what is going on with them at that moment. On the other hand, calculating is less difficult when specific life domains are concerned, as domains of life are easier to oversee than life-as-a-whole, and standards of success are often more evident (Veenhoven 1996, p. 21). This so-called 'bottom-up' appraisal will result in firm correlations between life satisfaction and domain-satisfactions because the former is based on the latter (Veenhoven 1996, p. 21).

In relation with the dimension *level of satisfaction with life as a whole*, the group evidenced a medium-low level of satisfaction with life in general (2. 8 in a scale of 7 points). In this case another interesting result was that only 21% of young people reported that they make a regular evaluation of their lives, and 18, 4% declared to have a "very clear" plan for their lives.

In relation to health, 73.7% of this group had private medical assistance plans, but 27% of this total used public hospitals<sup>7</sup> as well. In relation with this, the group interviewed said that their level of satisfaction with private medical assistance was 4.19 and with the assistance at public hospitals 6.71 (in a scale of 9 points).

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<sup>6</sup> The translation and adaptation was produced by Tonon, Rodriguez de la Vega and Aguilera (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Public hospitals are free in Argentina.



Sirgy et al. (2008, p. 37) showed the effect of satisfaction with health care on community well-being and quality of life. The authors argued that the greater the success of the health care system in one's community, the greater the satisfaction with the health care system and the greater the satisfaction with personal and family health. So, satisfaction with community overall is affected by satisfaction with healthcare.

The dimension feeling safe in the neighborhood comprises the perception of young people about walking in their neighborhood during the day, walking in their neighborhood during the night and the possibility of suffering a violent attack in the future. Results on this dimension are quite significant. At this point, it becomes necessary to highlight the concept of *social risk*, considered as an event that compromises the capacity of individuals to assure their own social independence because if they are not protected against these contingencies, insecurity takes place (Castel 2004, p. 34). In the specific case of the population under study, 72% declares that they feel safe walking in their neighborhood during the day.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the perception of safety during the night, scores drop down to 37.7%. With regard to the probability of becoming victims of a violent attack in the future, 50% of the individuals consider it probable, while 11.4% considers it improbable. These data sustain the idea that young people's general perception is that they live in a risky society in which the search for safety is endless and frustrating. Those risks are the contingencies of daily life from which it is not possible to protect oneself and, consequently, they are accepted as boundaries of the protection program that a society must provide (Castel 2004, p. 77).

In relation with the possibility of finding their first job, 41.2% young people said that they were able to find it because a family member or a friend helped them to do it. This has a connection with one of the tensions Weller (2007) identified in relation with young people's possibilities to access a job when he mentioned that young people lived the tension between a meritocratic discourse that lead them to make efforts and personal sacrifice to study for having a job and the reality of the market place in which personal contacts and recommendations play an important role in the access to first jobs.

There are others dimensions that showed interesting results. The dimension be respected in your choices, be able to be oneself, be independent to express your opinions, comprises the perception that young people have regarding the freedom to express their political opinions, to participate in political activities, to practice their religion and to respect, value and appreciate other people. This dimension has been thought considering Sen's framework (2000, p. 49) when he expressed that personal freedom is a social product that presents a bidirectional relationship among social mechanisms to expand personal freedom not only to enhance the quality of life of each individual but also to achieve better social mechanisms; considering also that

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<sup>8</sup> The different options for each situation have been considered, i.e. we added up the scores that corresponded to *completely*, *to some extent*, *very much*, in safety as well as in unsafety.

the political freedom and the civil freedom are important *per se* and that they do not have to be justified indirectly by their influence on economy (Sen 2000, p. 33). The answers coincide in that the highest score corresponds to the option “in total agreement” even if it does not achieve a high percentage:

*I respect, value and appreciate other people (57%),*  
*I feel free to practice my religion (51.8%),*  
*I feel free to express my political opinions (37%).*

Young people show their interest in public issues in a particular way, which might sometimes be mistakenly taken as a lack of interest on the subject. We will define “public issues” as a symbolic arena of collective deliberation and participation for citizens who care about issues of general interest that goes beyond politics to include the social dimension (Quiroga 1996, p. 151). The domain of public issues consists of a formal domain (institutions) and an informal domain (civil society) as it allows the communication among the community members.

It is also said that young people reject politics, when in fact their rejection is directed to the political actors. Additionally, young people also talk about the way in which people in general respond toward the politicians’ attitudes, and their opinion is that people respond when they obtain something in return. It is interesting to note that together with these opinions, young people consider politics as an instance for organizing the community and for defending ideas.

Another important aspect is the level of information that young people have on the assistance plans of national and local governments. This issue relates to the protective security that Sen (2000, p. 158) defines as the stable net of social protection and the extraordinary assistance Government provides when citizens are in emergency situations. In this sense, our research reveals that only 45.6% of young people interviewed is informed about the social government plans. On addressing these beneficiary plans, they form part of what is traditionally called “social assistance”, so it is important to make a brief reflection on the concept of “assistance”.

Sharing Castel’s (2004, p. 96) ideas, assistance cannot be considered as a founding element of social citizenship if this latter is based on an inferiority that becomes legalized by this means. The concept of citizenship carries a formal and abstract equality that implies a group of devices and bureaucratic rules for providing the social protection that highlights, necessarily, the administrative rationality, the Government planning and the formal and impersonal logic of assigning political values (Fleury 1997, p. 68). Thus, the development social citizenship implies the equal possibility of accessibility to the so-called social opportunities, and in this sense, Quiroga (1996, p. 155) noted that on talking about social citizenship it is necessary to count with the definition of a complete concept of citizenship, based on the idea of responsibility and solidarity as values that generate a commitment between the individual and the political body.

Finally, it can be said that what young people need in order to feel satisfied varies according to the different societies. At the same time it was important to conclude that this was the first research in which we noticed the significant connections between the possibility to access a job and quality of life in young

people population. This relation first detected will reiterate in the qualitative studies we later developed.

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## Chapter 2

# Young People's Citizenship and Participation

### 2.1 Citizenship

The definition of citizenship has changed in the past decades. Sandoval Moya, (2003) defines it as a historic category with an empirical content that is in constant transformation depending on the historic period, and Somers (1997) said that it is not possible to consider citizenship as a natural category as it depends on public and inter-subjective relationships.

In this way, the notion of citizenship widely exceeds the right to vote. Quiroga states (1996, p. 154), quoting Alain, that democracy is not defined by the universal vote but is based on the power of control that citizens exert. In addition, Przerworski (1998, p. 61) declares that the difficulty that democracy faces lies in the fact that being a system of positive right, the conditions required for the effective exercise of those rights and obligations are not created spontaneously, and in order for all citizens to exercise their rights, the necessary social conditions need to be present.

In 1949, Marshall proposed a definition of citizenship comprising three types of rights obtained in a sequential way: civil rights, political rights and social rights. From this perspective, the classic model of citizenship established the recognition of subjectivity that is functional for the material needs and symbolic view of the new economy but makes invisible other forms of subjectivity. In fact, most of the citizen fights in the second part of the twentieth century can be understood as a group of efforts for extending the view of the subject of rights, including new forms of citizenship: gender and citizenship, rural citizenship, multicultural citizenship, and during the recent years, youth citizenship (Sandoval Moya 2003, pp. 34, 35).

Since the 1960s, various debates on citizenship have taken place and since the 1990s, two positions about it can be recognized: the Rawls (1996) proposition,

about a social agreement considering a minimum of distributive justice that protects individuals' rights trying to reach equality; and the other proposition supported by Walzer (1993), Taylor (1994) and some other authors, constructed not only with equality but with the respect for ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

Actually, and in conjunction with Castillo García (2007, p. 766), it is possible to recognize two visions of citizenship: one that is considered traditional, referring to the relations of the citizens with the State, the society and the rules of participation in public life, and the other, defined as "new citizenships", that emerges in relation to the process of globalization, the advance of technology, the migration movements, the intercultural processes and the social recoveries.

A citizen is one who deliberates with others, moves with others in a conjoint mode, assumes the protagonist role of his own life and participates in public affairs (Cortina 2003). Castillo Garcia (2007) states that the process of configuration of citizenship derives from the different ways in which people relate to each other and from the ways they construct their community life.

Benedicto and Moran (2003, pp. 47, 48) explain that the different processes of acquisition and transformation of citizenship take place in relation to the processes that configure the social life and vital trajectories of people, based on a dynamic and relational conception of citizenship in which social practices are at the center of the argumentation, considering the multidimensional character of citizenship formed by a number of elements whose specific relation defines its social dynamics in a certain group or social context and considering the necessity of regaining the centrality of the sociopolitical component of citizenship.

At this point, it is relevant to include some thoughts regarding the conception of politics, as Martínez Pineda (2006, p. 136) puts forward, from a constituent perspective, going beyond the current areas for its application, and understanding that it is not possible to restrict it only to certain actors, organizations or political forces formally legitimated. It is necessary to recover what Arendt (2005, p. 67) proposes when she recognizes that the concept of politics is sustained in the existence of action and plurality as the basic human conditions. Politics is subjective and is a field of inter-subjective relations of conflicts (Lechner 2002).

Finally, and if the owner of citizenship is a legal subject with rights and obligations, these rights can only be guaranteed in a political community and, in this sense, citizenship must be understood as the product of social relations and the practice of these rights in the public sphere, and not as personal attributes previously defined.

## 2.2 Young People's Citizenship

Benedicto (2002, p. 2) recognized two types of youth citizenship: delegate citizenship and citizenship in project. But clearly, none of them represents a whole citizenship. In the case of young people, the exercise of real citizenship is a

question related to the future (what they will be, not what they are) as they are not yet adults so they are not yet citizens.

The entire exercise on citizenship is not a problem that affects only young people, it affects other members of the community as well. Since the time the vote existed in Latin America, people have fought to obtain "effective citizenship", which is to say the existence of necessary social conditions that allowed the exercise of citizenship. We agree with Przerworski (1998, p. 68) when he questions the possibility of speaking about democracy in situations in which this type of citizenship does not exist.

Young people show their interest in public issues in a particular way, which might sometimes be mistakenly taken as a lack of interest on the subject. We will define "public issues" as a symbolic arena of collective deliberation and participation for citizens who care about issues of general interest that go beyond politics to include the social dimension (Quiroga 1996, p. 151). The domain of public issues consists of a formal domain (institutions) and an informal domain (civil society) as it allows communication among community members. It is also said that young people reject politics, when in fact their rejection is directed at the traditional political actors. Young people's participation is characterized today with a proximity to others, with clear claims in relation to their life that they do not express their demands through traditional institutions (Balardini 2000).

It is necessary to reevaluate the relationship between the State and citizens and to redefine public space as a scenario for social interaction. In this way, the participation of young people in public space presents specific characteristics as citizenship exercise is conditioned by social and governmental particularities in the Latin American context.

## 2.3 Young People's Participation

What are the actual ways in which young people participate in public life? Bendit (2000, p. 35) proposes three areas to study young people's political participation: the interest in politics, the confidence in political institutions and the active political participation.

Participation implies considering subjects as the protagonists of the decisions, so if we speak about acting conjointly, we are not speaking precisely about participation. Participation is more than acting together; it is about making decisions together. In this way we can recognize two types of participation: real participation and symbolic participation. Sirvent (2008, p. 122) states that real participation occurs when the members of a group (organization) take part effectively in all institutional processes and in the nature of decisions; whereas in symbolic participation people do not influence decisions. This kind of participation is one that makes people have the illusion of participation.

Real participation implies the democratization of knowledge and the redistribution of power to make the necessary changes in response to social needs.

Hart (1993, p. 6) pointed out that participation is the capacity to express decisions that are recognized in the social space and affects one's own life and community life, and noticed that the capacity to participate can be reached only gradually and with practice, because it cannot be taught in abstract.

In a qualitative study developed in Argentina during 2009–2010 on young people's participation we interviewed 20 young people, male and female who had a history of participation.<sup>1</sup>

The objectives of the research were: to develop a study of citizen-community and political participation of young people's compromise with their own communities and to understand young people's perception about citizenship and their own participation in urban communities.

From the statements of the interviewed subjects three different expressions about participation could be identified: the political participation, the community participation and the civil participation. These imply the different concepts related among them.

First, the experience of politics appeared with the sense of freedom and, resembling Arendt (Birulés 2005), we will say that the Greek polis was the only place where the subjects could show who they were; and this came from the idea of plurality while being a constitutive element of the human condition. This plurality that Arendt was indicating is not identical to the simple alterity but is related to the distinction. From this perspective politics is not any social modality of life 'because the plurality of the human beings in a world that they constitute jointly is not assimilable to the homogeneous unit of the mankind' (Birulés 2005, p. 21).

So what distinguished human coexistence in the polis was freedom. According to Arendt (2005, p. 63) 'The sense of the politics is freedom'. The opinions of young people refer to politics as a tool of emancipation and as an instance of personal satisfaction, related to passion; with the idealist youth, it is the need for joining and working together, not giving a leading place to money as an element of satisfaction but indicating that working for the country is exciting and a reason for happiness. Likewise, it is held that everything is related to politics and that everything a subject does is political in some way.

Also, politics appears as a relationship, concurrent with Arendt (2005, p. 46), when she stated that 'politics arises in the between and is established as relation', which takes us to the memory of the polis and of the dialog that also appears in the statements of young people as an element of interaction.

Corruption is mentioned as a negative element. Sen (2000) states the guarantees of transparency, defined as the honesty that people can expect and the freedom to be interrelated with the guarantee of spreading information and clarity; these are the guarantees that fulfill a fundamental role in the prevention of corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> Research project *Young people politic, community and citizen participation in Argentina*. Director Graciela Tonon, Department of Law and Political Science, Universidad Nacional de La Matanza. 2009–2010, Argentina.



Likewise, Gillman (2010) visualizes corruption as the factor that demotivates participation.

The recognition of belonging to a community not only contains a feeling of rooting, but also implies a feeling of responsibility and loyalty. The idea of citizenship is articulated from the recognition that members of the community have features that identify them and distinguish them from those who are not a part of it. The idea of community allows to visualize individuals as subjects and in this respect we are reminded of Lechner (2002), when he indicated that politics is also subjective and an inter-subjective field of conflict's relations. In this research, young people spoke about politics in terms of a psychological office, recognizing it as a space where people can be heard, and thereby appearing as the relation specifically of the partisan and arriving at the sphere of human relations of affective and social support.

As a positive indicator, it appears as the possibility of change and the vote as a concrete instrument to generate a project of a country. Gillman (2010) visualizes young men and women as agents of development, innovation and social change in Latin America. In agreement with this idea, in this research young people proposed the idea of voting with conscience and thinking about a project of the country, recognizing the possibility of change to the extent that one works in a collaborative way and indicating the need to do it in a systematic way instead of simply doing it once every often.

Finally, community participation appears first before the recognition of the existence of social need, and this reflection brings over the way of approaching them. Young people recognized that it is not the individual who has to go with armed solutions 'as a box of lights' to help people, but managing to find the way to solve the problem by departing from the reality of others.

Today, the participation of young men and women is characterized by their proximity in their meeting with others, according to Balardini (2000, p. 9) from face-to-face relations, where the product of the participation is visible and tangible, with punctual actions and concrete claims, from near relations all of which are not canalized by traditional organizations.

Young people centre their attention on joint work and on community participation, describing the democratic participation related to the local and to the immediate matter at hand. The voluntary action appears as Hopenhayn said (2004, p. 19): *it allows to involve a young person to be placed as protagonist and not like underprivileged person, as supplier and not as salesman, as hero and not as victim, as employee who starts on a very low salary and not as object of suspicion on the part of the adults.*

In their statements young people described the different activities they developed in the community area: civic voluntary work like help to neighbors, football matches as a way of integrating the members of the community, recognizing the need and importance of collective work recognizing that if it is not like that it would not have legitimacy. They indicated the need to produce actual results rather than spending time in eternal discussions that do not lead to anything, as some politicians do.

It can be recognized in this research two of the seven trends that Hopenhayn (2004) identified when he referred to the social and political participation of young people at present: the increasing importance acquired by new associative modalities of informal character and the participation in groups of voluntary work. The community participation appears in relation to the recognition of the existence of social needs and of the reflection it brings on the way of approaching them.

Considering what we explained, it can be said that on studying young people's participation we recognized two public spaces that facilitate the process of construction of citizenship: community and university. In this sense, authors like Castillo Garcia (2007) recognized that society and education are scenarios where young people develop their life and facilitate their construction as subjects.

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# Chapter 3

## Satisfaction with Life in the Community and in the Country

### 3.1 Community

The concept of citizenship has always implied belonging to a community and to the level of participation in it. This belonging to a common space is considered in the classic view as communitarian and in the modern view as public, implying the relationship between subjects and space and a particular mode of legitimating the institutional structure.

The idea that a citizen is a member of a political community was born in the Athenian democracy in the fifth century BC. But in ancient Greece three elements established the condition of citizenship: the origin, the fact of being a member of a social group and the geographical localization. The residence in a particular territory did not transform people into citizens in a direct way, because the “city” was considered not only a place to live, but was also a system of normative relations that allowed living together (Castillo García 2007).

The first meaning of the concept of “community” showed that *common* does not mean of one’s own, but it begins where one’s own finished. It means that what concerns everybody has a public character, and *munus* implied the idea of owing and giving (Espósito 2003, pp. 25–31). In this way the reciprocity of giving determines compromise. So in the ancient sense the significance of *communis* meant sharing a load and *comunitas* was the group of people who are the members of the community.

In the case of community it is important to note that it does not imply uniformity, as community means the inclusion of diversity and the achievement of sharing within it. The community is a totality that has meaning for the people that make a part of it. Lo Biondo (1999) said that the specificity of the concept is in relation to inter-subjectivity and to matters of sharing. Sarason (1974) considered it as a network of relations that produced mutual support. Blanco Abarca (1988, p. 12) stated that community means more than the accumulation of individuals, more than a geographic concentration. He even recognized that the fact of sharing a territory

facilitates the interaction between their members. He said that the concept of community is in relation with a physical proximity, a common work, a direct relation, social support, participation, consensus, common beliefs and conjoint actions towards a main objective, intense and extended relationships and a sense of fraternity.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century it was Maya Jariego (2004, p. 190) who explained that community could be understood as a locality and group; the first one referred to the neighborhood, the city or a rural area and the second one was based on interpersonal relations more than geography. The author gave examples about the second one as social organizations, syndicates or professional associations in which their members not necessarily shared a geographic space.

Cortina (2005, p. 3) states that human beings not only seek justice, but they are born and they live in a community in which they learn how to live. Citizenship is articulated by recognizing that members of the community have special features that characterize them and identify them as a part of this community.

The beginning of this century presented us with new models of community that imply that the traditional concept has changed as also the way people participate in community spaces. Today when we speak about community we are not considering the traditional definition principally in relation to the territory, that facilitates identity, because today the place of residence is not necessarily the space with which people identify and where they participate.

The present social transformations affect the community's distinctive traditional characteristic of the space limits, the fact of being formed by a few members that meet each other face to face. Hence, it is necessary to recognize the arrival of the digital era that moves forward the communications barrier (Bauman 2003).

In this sense, Maya Jariego (2004, pp. 188–190) mentioned the flow in the internet of different types of virtual communities that do not need face-to-face contact and are independent of people's geographical residence. In the case of young people, they grew up in the middle of this process of development of new communities resulting to be more active members of them.

### **3.2 Satisfaction with Life in the Community: Young People's Opinion**

For Veenhoven (1996) satisfaction is a state of mind and an evaluative appraisal of something; the term refers to cognitive as well as affective-appraisals and it can be both evanescent and stable through time.

When we ask a person about the satisfaction he/she feels to be a member of the community where he/she lives, the answer presents different types of elements. Satisfaction with life in the community makes people speak about situations like: safety in daily life, social services, interaction between neighbors, infrastructure and equipment, public transportation, job availability, leisure and the possibility to

meet other people of the community in public places for sharing ideas and discussing common preoccupations and needs.

And as satisfaction with a part of the life represents a report of how each person considers this situation about what is interviewed, to ask someone about the level of satisfaction with life in the community where he/she lives, represents a report on the level of satisfaction of community life.

Diener (2006) stated that satisfaction domains are judgments people make for evaluating different areas of their life, but to understand precisely the level of satisfaction that each person has in each area, it is necessary to ask first about how important it is for him/her, how much he/she enjoys it and how much he/she wants to change it.

Ferris (2006, p. 117) recognized two forces that produced quality of life: the endogenous and the exogenous. Endogenous forces include mental, emotional and physiological responses of the individual to its life condition. Exogenous forces include social structure (demographic characteristics, institutions, cultural patterns and psycho-social community characteristics), cultural and social psychological influences of social environment that impinge upon the individual, group and community.

Sirgy et al. (2000) and Sirgy and Cornwell (2001) argued that satisfaction with community services as well as community conditions predict a significant portion of the variance in community satisfaction. The authors said that community well-being was a predictor of life satisfaction and explained this relationship using the bottom-up spillover theory, the basic premise of which is that life satisfaction is functionally related to satisfaction with all life domains (Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell et al. 1976; Diener 1984). In a study developed by Sirgy et al. (2008) about how a resident's satisfaction with community services influences quality of life outcomes, the findings revealed that satisfaction with community services tend to impact community well-being directly and through satisfaction in various life domains: education, health care, job availability, government, public safety and shopping and transportation.

The perception and evaluation of people's quality of life in the city where they lived was studied by Filomena Maggino in 2003 in Florence, Italy. During the 7th ISQOL International Conference in Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa (2006) Dr. Maggino presented her study developed in a conjoint form between the City of Florence (Italy) and the University of Florence. This research focused on the study of citizens' perception and evaluation of the quality of life in their city and the main objective was to re-qualify the city life through fair policies that responded to residents' needs. The study also attempted to develop some particular indicators of quality of life in order to measure and interpret the levels of suitability of the living conditions that the city of Florence offers to its inhabitants. In order to study the interaction between each individual and the urban environment three different levels were defined: housing-space, neighborhood space and whole city. The questionnaire applied was structured in two areas: relationship of the citizen with the city (the neighborhood area and the life in Florence) and the aspects of individual life (individual living

condition, values, subjective perceptions and financial situation). The results show that citizens have a general positive relation with their city in terms of both perception and evaluation; from a methodological point of view that the proposed approach allows to measure the defined areas to explore the connection of the different levels of the indicators also with other individual characteristics and from the policy point of view that the aggregation analysis suggested that the requirement to find syntheses has to take into account the risk of excessive synthesis.

Royuela et al. (2003), presented the Composite Quality of Life Index (CQLI) they applied in 314 municipalities of Barcelona province (Spain) during the decade of the nineties. The CQLI considers three main components of quality of life: individual opportunities of progress in relation to wealth, labor, education level, health level and mobility possibilities; index of social equilibrium that considers social inequalities as sexual inequalities, migration, housing, access service for old people; and community conditions of life that considers housing, public transportation, education services, health services, environment, cultural and local taxes. The authors showed a statistical methodology for measuring quality of life in small areas that allow temporal comparisons. The result was an instrument for local policy makers as it presents an overview of quality of life in the local communities and a focused vision of each dimension of it (Royuela et al. 2003, p. 71).

Santos et al. (2007) conducted a survey to study citizens' perception of their local quality of life (city of Porto, Portugal) and its evolution. The questionnaire applied was structured in four dimensions: quality of life as a global concept, quality of life as specific evaluation of the present situation of the city of Porto and in terms of its recent evolution; quality of personal life and quality of life in the individual's residential area (neighborhood). It was a quantitative–qualitative study based on the idea that the combination of both approaches is the most promising perspective for a more complete evaluation of urban quality of life (Santos et al. 2007, p. 53).

In the study we developed in 2005 about young people's quality of life an interesting result showed that the level of satisfaction with being a member of the community has a medium of 6.04 that lies below the general tendency observed in other countries. At the same time only 17.8% of participants declared that they participate in some kind of community group. These results could indicate that the participation of young people relates more to virtual communities rather than to the social–geographical space of belonging.

In concordance with Sirgy et al. (2000) we notice the difference between community and neighborhood, as neighborhood is conceptualized as that geography considered by most individuals as their nearest psychic space beyond the home. So we will speak about *neighborhood safety* as one dimension for the study of community, as we did in our research developed in 2007–2008 and mentioned before in this book.

### 3.3 Satisfaction with Life in the Country: Young People's Opinions

Considering the macro level of quality of life, Tonon (2009) produced a scale to measure the level of satisfaction with quality of life in the country: *Scale with satisfaction with life in the country* (ESCV, Tonon 2009). It is a scale with five points in which “1” corresponds to “totally unsatisfied” and “5” to “totally satisfied”.

The scale was constructed considering the analysis of research projects previously developed by the author, giving importance to these kinds of variables first used and showed interesting results in the country, and including other specific variables constructed to measure some phenomena detected as social problems.

The instrument contains different variables that inquire about satisfaction with: quality of life, street safety in daily life, the preservation of the environment, State health, access to State health system, State educational system, access to State educational system, job opportunities in your area, the possibility people have of owning houses, general economic situation of the country, the social security system in the country, government policies in relation with citizen needs, the transparency of government decisions, government social welfare programs, government assistance provided to people in emergency situations, tax system, political freedom that people enjoy in the country, how people maintain and take care of public places, how people respect cultural diversity, how people respect religious diversity.

Some of the variables were inspired considering previous instruments first used as the WBI, others were thought of considering the careful observations of situations that happened in daily life and still others were in agreement with some theoretical concepts.

In reference with daily life situations, the following variables were constructed: street safety conditions in daily life, preservation of the environment, government decisions in relation to population needs, government social assistance plans and people's care of public places.

Theoretical concepts of different authors were considered on Sen (2000) framework about human capabilities, when the author speaks about social opportunities (public health and education), transparency of government decisions and people's respect for cultural and religious diversity. Regarding the other concepts we take Przeworski (1998) concept about sustainable democracy that considers that the practice of citizens' rights needed effective social conditions, for example the possibility of having a house and a job.

Sen (2000, p. 58) defines health as a social opportunity requiring sanitary services in the society and which influences the fundamental freedom of the subjects to live better. The author regards these services as important for private life, since they are important not only as a factor for allowing a healthy life and avoiding the avoidable morbidities, but also they play a role in the political and economic activities of society.



In the case of Health policies, Sen (2002) proposes that they should differentiate the equality in the achievements of health (possibilities and freedoms) and in the distribution of sanitary resources. This implies checking the importance of the justice of the processes, that is to say the absence of discrimination in the presentation of sanitary assistance for which it is necessary to differ between two questions, one that centers on the achievement of health and one that relates to the real possibility of citizens of reaching health; the focus of reflection is on the equity that needs to be considered, since health relates to the assignment of resources, as well as to the existence of social agreements.

We consider education as one of the instances of construction of effective citizenship and as a strategy of improvement of citizen's quality of life (Tonon 2005, p. 97). Education is not only associated with the extension of future possibilities of insertion into the labor market, but it conforms itself as one of the routes of accomplishment of personal and community life. In this respect we concur with Freire (2002, p. 94) when he says that education is fundamentally a political act.

Regarding work, we take Vélez Restrepo's idea who defines it not just as a technical relation of production but as a form of inscription in the social structure, identifying a narrow relation between the place that it takes up in the social division of the work, the networks of sociableness and the systems of social safety (Vélez Restrepo, 2003, p. 88). At present the labor paths have turned mobile, from the institutionalization of the non standardization of work that implies the individualization of tasks and imposes the mobility, adaptability and availability of the employees and the technical translation of the flexibility that demands the responsibility of every subject or equipment on the administration and on the quality of his production (Castel 2004).

Hereby a biographical model is installed (Beck 1992) in which every person must confront for her/his own the contingencies of his professional tour that has become discontinuous, must make choices and undertake from time to time the restructures that seem necessary. So the worker does not occupy a working place any more but he/she must "do" a working place (Castel 2004). Thus this individualization of the labor paths produces a responsibility for the agents, since they must confront situations, assume change and take charge of oneself. The subject is thus forced to be free, imposing on him the fact of being capable of a good performance and being liberated her/himself to a large extent (Castel 2004). Likewise, the lack of safety related to employment is not just perceived by those who do not find employment because of the global wastage of labor demand but also someone who has employment can experiment a sensation of precariousness that arises before restructures, mergers and sales of companies that take place in a common way.

When we consider the dimension of *government and public policies* we refer to the answers of the government in relation to people's needs and to the guarantees of transparency, that is to say the need for honesty and the freedom to be inter-related with the guarantee of the spreading of information and clarity; these guarantees fulfill a fundamental role in the prevention of corruption (Sen 2000).

Although traditionally public policies have been formed concerning the satisfaction of social or collective rights, as an external activity and provided by the State, nowadays there is a change from the traditional approach to an approach based on human rights, characterized by an effort for constructing a reflexive capacity orientated to developing a type of citizenship that involves not only the political-state recognition, but also the socio-cultural one. Hereby, a process for designing of public policies is proposed, which is characterized by the interaction among their phases and the possibility of a permanent adjustment between its decisions–actions with the aim of optimizing the results (INDES 2006).

Relative to *safety in daily life*, authors like Borja (1998) indicate that urban insecurity can be considered to be a sign of social alert, with contradiction related to socialization of the urban space that is usable for the great majority of the population, and the exclusion or the poor economic and cultural integration of social groups that occupy the city but cannot use its fundamentally commercial offers (Borja 1998, p. 5). In this sense, the author affirms that the best way to guarantee the safety of public space is the continuity of its social use, that is to say, the presence of people, facilitating its utilization by all the persons and all the social groups (Borja 1998, p. 28).

Although *public modern space* comes from the formal separation between private urban property and public property, it presents a socio-cultural dimension being a place of relation and identification, of contact between the subjects and community expression (Borja 1998, p. 2). Then, public spaces are spaces common to everybody, those in which opinions are expressed, debates and joint activities take place, living in community is enjoyed and, in this sense, it is an indicator of democracy.

The inclusion of the dimension of importance regarding *religious and cultural diversities* exceeds the discussion about the State, coming to the sphere of the civil society recognized as an active subject in the process of construction of societies that include the difference. For Max Neef et al. (1986, p. 49) diversity is the best way to stimulate creative and synergic potentials that exist in any company, provided that the unit does not mean uniformity, and thinking that the unit can be firmer when the participation in the diversity is stimulated.

For *political freedoms*, Sen (2000) includes human rights and the opportunities people have to decide the one who must govern them, to be able to express politically, criticize the authorities, as well as the right to vote, to being voted and to take part in the legislative and executive branches.

The *system of social protection*, is defined by Sen (2000) as the network of social stable protection, that is to say, the institutionally fixed mechanisms (for example the insurance of unemployment) and the extraordinary aids, which the government offers to citizens in emergency situations. And provided that the governmental plans of aid combines with the traditional term of 'social assistance', it is necessary to do a brief reflection on the concept of 'assistance', coinciding with Castel (2004, p. 96) wherein the right to the assistance cannot be considered to be a foundation of the social citizenship if it is granted for an inferiority that remains so legalized.

The term *environment* is used in a broad sense to mean the external physical conditions people live in and experience, including the built environment. At the most fundamental level, the ecosystem sustains and contains our society and economy and a functioning ecosystem is a prerequisite to human well-being. Local environment and particularly natural environment, meets a wide range of human needs and promotes well-being (Shah and Peck 2005, p. 2).

According to Lucero et al. (2008, pp. 100–101) the *housing* is not only a building but it is constituted as an element of insertion and social identification, being a configuration of housing services that must offer people environmental satisfaction, space, life of relation, safety, privacy, identity and physical accessibility.

In addition, it can be recognized that some of the variables in the scale relate to the concept of “democracy”. This scale does not measure in a direct way the theoretical construct *satisfaction with democracy*. The term satisfaction with democracy emerges in relation to the discrepancy between how democracy should work and the way it actually works (Wagner et al. 2003). Satisfaction with democracy reveals a lack of agreement in what it measures because multiple interpretations are possible regarding individuals, time or space. Different authors (Clarke et al. 1993; Fuchs 1993; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Dalton 1999; Norris 1999; Canache et al. 2001) had different opinions about the theoretical implications and consistency of satisfaction with democracy as a significant measure of how satisfied people are with democracy in the country where they live (Tonon 2011).

We applied the ESCVP to a sample of 401 people, 108 of them were young people from 21 to 30 years old, living in the Departments of Great Buenos Aires area, male and female.<sup>1</sup>

The results showed that the level of satisfaction with the quality of life in the country was 2.65. The highest values were for the level of satisfaction with political freedoms 3.44 and for the respect of religious diversity 3.13. The lowest ones were for the level of satisfaction with security conditions 1.79 and the possibilities of having an own house 1.83, preservation of the environment 1.94 and preservation of public spaces 1.93. The other variables ranked 2.2–2.9. The Cronbach alpha was 0.815. Considering the first studies it is important to note that the highest value in this opportunity was for the political freedoms.

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<sup>1</sup> These results correspond to the application of the scale in the course *Quantitative Methodology*, career of Political Science, Department of Law and Political Science of the Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, Argentina, where the author was Titular Professor, 2010.

**ESCVP (Tonon 2009)**

	N	Min.	Máx.	Media	SD.
Satisfaction with quality of life	108	1	5	265	930
Satisfaction with street safety in daily life	108	1	5	179	876
Satisfaction with the preservation of the environment	108	1	4	194	863
Satisfaction with State health system	108	1	5	252	971
Satisfaction with access to State health system	108	1	5	256	988
Satisfaction with State educational system	108	1	5	282	1,022
Satisfaction with access to State educational system	108	1	5	296	1,135
Satisfaction with job opportunities in your area	108	1	5	231	1,000
Satisfaction with the possibility people have in owning house	108	1	5	1,83	1,063
Satisfaction with general economic situation in the country	108	1	4	226	847
Satisfaction with the social security system in the country		1	5	222	0.931
Satisfaction with government policies in relation with citizen needs		1	4	242	0.978
Satisfaction with the transparency of government decisions		1	5	210	1,004
Satisfaction with government social welfare program		1	5	246	1,234
Satisfaction with government assistance provided to people in emergency situations	108	1	5	257	1,095
Satisfaction with tax system	108	1	4	269	990
Satisfaction with political freedom that people enjoy in the country	108	1	5	344	998
Satisfaction with how people maintain and care of public places	108	1	5	193	893
Satisfaction with how people respect cultural diversity	108	1	4	273	982
Satisfaction with how people respect religious diversity	108	1	5	313	1,024

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# Chapter 4

## University and Quality of Life

### 4.1 University

The university was born in the twelfth century, designed as an association provided with units, shaped by groups of people whose aims were corporative and without having been associated necessarily with a physical place. Hereby, while corporation, the university was expressing the organization of its members who were defending the monopoly to teach, which was symbolized in the grant of the license.

The most ancient European universities appeared between 1180 and 1230 as supranational institutions, and it is from the thirteenth century that the groups that began to become autonomous gave place to the generation of the powers, which conformed as cores, from the development of different disciplines.

In time, universities gradually became free from the political and ecclesiastical power, and at the end of the Middle Ages, the big universities turned into real political powers, playing an active role in fights that took place between the states, to finally join with the new national structures of the times (Le Goff 2001, p. 132).

In the twenty-first century the university has changed its traditional role of production and reproduction of scientific knowledge, to being an interaction space in the diversity as a social institution of reference for people to carry out their daily life in this scenario. From this point of view and taking into account Sen (2000) theoretical proposal, we consider the possibility of accessing to university studies as a social opportunity and at the same time as a beginning of a new way to improve the quality of life.

We regard the university as a social institution of reference to the subjects who live and spend their daily life in it, which implies considering it much more than a place of construction and reproduction of knowledge, since it is important to see it also as a space of socialization and construction of effective citizenship. According to Murcia Peña (2009)

*The university is a social, cultural, political, ethical-esthetic and cognitive scene, where ideas, feelings and projects are confronted constantly, but especially where many experiences can be lived and shared, theories and sensibilities that try to help to support, to construct and to develop the individual, the society and the culture* (Murcia Peña, 2009, p. 244).

In relation to this Cortina (2005, p. 19) indicates that it turns out necessary to achieve the education of deep-rooted citizens, compromised with their local community, knowing that the citizenship leads them to work for the world to which they belong as citizens.

The university gives students (and teachers) the possibility of feeling a sense of identity that grows up in terms of integration. Taylor argues that (1993, p. 43) identity is formed from the recognition, for the lack of it or for the false recognition of others and this is particularly relevant if we follow the idea of Gutman (1993) when she says that individual identity is partially constructed in a collective dialog.

## **4.2 University as a Scenario of Construction of Young People's Citizenship**

We began to study the university as a scenario of construction of citizenship in relation to quality of life in 2005 in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora.

This was when we decided to develop qualitative studies, using semi-structured interviews in order to produce deep descriptions of the situation and discovered new possible indicators for future research.

During 2008–2009, we developed a study using qualitative methods, and we studied the university as a scenario of construction of citizenship. To do this we interviewed students of different ages who studied Political Science at the Universidad Nacional de La Matanza (Argentina); ten of them were 21–25 years old, male and female.

The objective of the study was the description of the perceptions of Political Sciences students of Universidad Nacional de La Matanza in relation to the role of university as a scenario of construction of citizenship.

The results obtained with this group showed that students speak about the role of the university for the construction of citizenship and the learning of being a citizen, visualizing the possibility to study as a possibility for being a citizen and taking into account that in Argentina national public universities are free.

In consonance with Sen (2000) when he says that education is a social opportunity (as an equally original situation for everybody) we can recognize that university becomes an institution that enables the process of construction of citizenship. The role of social opportunities is to expand human agency and freedom. People's opportunities depend on their relations with others and the actions of the



governments and institutions. And as Cortina (1997) says the assets of a society are social assets that must be socially distributed.

The students spoke about the importance of the relation between university and context and presented two different visions that coexisted in the same reality: the lack of participation that includes the idea that “public things belong to nobody” and at the same time the idea about the importance of participation for the collective construction of society. Birulés (2005, p. 22) comments Arendt, saying that public sphere is characterized by equality and is only the political act which can generate equality considering the laws, but not in the sense that law reduces the differences to equalities, but in the sense that law authorizes the possibilities of words and actions.

Regarding the university's role for construction of citizenship and learning to be a citizen, we agree with the idea that construction is a process in relation with something that people want to produce so that a lot of actions to reach it are developed, that turn people's intentions real, and is related to the future but has its roots in the present (Castillo García 2007).

From the discourses of young people we can identify two different visions: university as a scenario of construction of citizenship and simultaneously university as a scenario of reproduction of the institutional system.

As a scenario of construction of citizenship students recognized that the university is an institution that facilitates this construction taking into account the knowledge that it gives and the possibility to learn how to live respecting others. This is in consonance with the idea that it is the citizen who takes care of public affairs, and not only private affairs, and it is the citizen who knows that deliberation is the adequate way to deal with them (Cortina 1997, p. 44).

In terms of considering university as a scenario of reproduction of institutional system objectives, the young student's vision is contrary to the first one. In this case university is only recognized as a place to prepare professionals who will respond to the historic needs and in this way university is considered as a part of a mechanism of reproduction of the interest of the power and governmental groups.

### 4.3 University, Quality of Life and Access to a First Job

In the qualitative research project we developed in 2005,<sup>1</sup> in which our main objective was to identify the value that young university students give to access to the university as a strategy for improving their quality of life. We interviewed 10 students, who mostly speak about the relation between quality of life and having a job.

First of all we must say that we agree with the idea that job cannot be only defined as an activity to obtain money, as it is based on personal identity and is a

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<sup>1</sup> Tonon, G (2005) has developed this idea in the study *A strategy of improvement quality of life: university as a space of social integration*. Research Program on Quality of Life, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, Argentina.

vehicle of social and political participation (Cortina 1997). At the same time, job is a field that structures social relations and subjectivities (de la Garza, 2007).

Even the OIT (2007) considers that young people are a group with more possibilities to work in Latin America, though the real possibilities to find a job are still difficult for them. Young people born in the late 1980s or in the early 1990s grew up seeing the world labor market transformation, with the processes of globalization, expansion of new technologies, people migration, labor crisis and flexibilization. The possibility of them having a job in the actual labor market has been studied in Argentina by authors (Kessler 2002; Beccaria 2005) who speak about the relation between the uncertain labor future and the characteristics of the actual labor market.

Since two decades ago, Latin American countries developed plans to optimize the youth labor insertion and it is important to note that the real possibilities of having a job for young people are better in relation to the improvement in the level of employment in the region. But the differences between groups considering ages still exist. The youth obtain jobs more quickly than adults but at the same time they lose it more quickly. The jobs they obtain are in most cases temporary. Jacinto (2008) says that young people, who are superior in number to adults, work in informal jobs, obtain less remuneration and have less possibility to have medical private plans.

Our study results showed that young students visualize labor insertion as the final stage of previous life periods: the beginning of previous activities during university studies to enter in contact with the labor market, the development of voluntary activities for which service professions are studied and the necessity to continue studying a post-graduate program in relation to the recognition of the difficulties for obtaining a job especially in the field of social sciences.

The illusion of working in the professional fields they studied as one of the forms for improving their quality of life makes in this way to relate to the possibility of studying at the university with the empowerment of quality of life in subjective and objective terms. Quality of life is associated with life satisfaction, with enjoying doing what they like to do. This is to say that quality of life is recognized as making sense of one's own life. The picture is completed with the view of education as one of the opportunities for obtaining an effective citizenship. It can be recognized as some discourses expressed in a traditional way that obtaining a university degree is the possibility of having a job and gives people social prestige.

Speaking about difficulties the youth face to obtain their first jobs Capeletti and Byk (2008) identify the labor precariousness and segmentation of labor itineraries conducted from school and university to the labor market. In this sense it is important to mention the historical existence of a breach between academic studies and the labor market.

During 2009–2010 we developed a qualitative study<sup>2</sup> recently finished at the Psychology Research Center at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Universidad de

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<sup>2</sup> *The breach between university studies and professional exercise in health field.* Dra. Graciela Tonon (Directora) Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Palermo, Argentina (2009–2010).

Palermo, Argentina, in which I coordinated a team formed by doctoral students for the study of the breach between academic studies and professional exercise, as perceived by health professionals who work in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.<sup>3</sup> The main objectives of the research were the description of the characteristics of the academic studies in the health field and the identification of similarities and differences between year of graduation and type of institution (public or private).

We interviewed 20 professionals who working in the health field in different types of health institutions (private and public), with different years of graduation (from 1980 to 2009) who had studied in public and private universities, with different ages (24–60 years old). The most important results were people's recognition of the existence of a breach between academic studies and professional exercise in the health field, which they related to the insufficient number of places to develop practice training when they were students and the acquisition of contextual knowledge about the labor market in advance before they graduated, in order to facilitate the possibility of having their first job. At the same time they recognized an increase in the number of students and the insufficient equipment and infrastructure at the universities.

Currently, during 2010–2011, we are developing a new qualitative study focused on quality of life and future images of young students of the first year of different careers of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora<sup>4</sup> (18–23 years old, male and female).

The main objective of the study was to analyze the future images of young university students in relation to the possibility to have a job after finishing studies, and in relation to their quality of life considering the actual particularities of the socio-economic and political contexts.

The first analysis of the results, as the project is not finished yet, showed that young university students expressed in all the cases that they are satisfied with their quality of life; they even related this satisfaction with different dimensions of it. Half of the samples related this satisfaction to the possibility of having a job, and the others with having good family relationships, with their religiosity, with the possibility of continuing their studies and with economic status.

Lucero (2008 p. 253) says that the influence of job in people's quality of life can be detected in two forms: the variables that showed employment situation and the quality of the employment based on the workers' social protection. Ferris (2006) offered ten propositions that identify theoretical relationships between social structural features and well-being, and we can recognize two of them in our study:

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<sup>3</sup> Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires is the capital of the country.

<sup>4</sup> Tonon, G. (Director) *Quality of life and future images of young university students*. Faculty of Social Sciences, Research Program on Quality of Life. Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, Argentina (2010–2011).

1. Wealth and income enable the acquisition of resources for the satisfaction of wants, thereby affecting the quality of life; while income is not the only determinant, it is an important contributor to quality of life (Diener and Biswas Diener 2002; Ferriss 2002b).
2. People religiosity and affiliation with faith-based agencies defines groups according to world view and ethical beliefs that affect behavior and provide the source of satisfactions, and there are studies that support the proposition that participation in religious institutions is associated with happiness and life satisfaction (Ferriss 2002a).

If we consider the difficulties described in relation with having a job, we can understand the reason that makes young people relate their quality of life with this situation. In this way it is important to mention that Sirgy et al. (2008, p. 88) have studied the effect of satisfaction with job availability on community well-being and quality of life. They said that satisfaction with the community overall is affected partly by job availability which in turn impacts financial, work and family well-being. In this way the increases in satisfaction with community life lead to increases in satisfaction with life overall.

In this sense it is important to mention that since 2008 Argentina has developed a new social program in which the main objective is to generate opportunities for young people to have their social and labor inclusion. It includes young people from 18 to 24 years old who have a permanent residence in the country, have not finished elementary school and do not have a job (Deibe 2008). The national statistical information showed that during the first 2 years of implementation, 65,000 young people were incorporated into this program.

Finally we can say that in our studies, the main role assigned to job as a vehicle of improvement of quality of life appeared as an element of the interaction process of construction of citizenship.

As Max Neef et al. stated (1986, p. 67) a development integral perspective must sustain a wide concept of work in the sense of generation of incomes as in their effects in peoples' quality of life, as a satisfactor of human needs and a catalyst of social energies.

#### **4.4 University and Community Relations: The Configuration of a New Public Space**

Traditionally, a scheme of work university–society was being developed based mainly on the transfer of knowledge on a scheme of interaction that allows the first contact and approximation to the outside of the university institutions. The current challenge centers on extending the work in the construction of relations university–community that put the knowledge generated by the university, in response to the social needs of the population.

The public space has been associated traditionally with the role of the State, notwithstanding the current reality of our region needs, the participation of the citizens in the topics of the community and in the processes of decision and execution of these decisions, and it is hereby that the public space conforms an area of civil and community participation.

In this scene, fits the university considered as social institution of reference and belonging, a leading role in the development of relations with the community of which it is a part, with the aim to form a new expression of the public thing in terms of relation between the subjects and of space of construction of citizenship.

For Habermas (1962–1994) the origins of the public sphere registered in the Greek polis was considered as a place of free citizens, as well as in the Roman law in which it reached its juridical institutionalization. In this respect Birulés (2005) remembering Arendt indicates that the Greek polis was the only place where subjects could prove to be those who were, which develops from the idea of plurality while being a constitutive element of the human condition.

The public sphere is characterized as differing from the domestic sphere and in this sense it is formed as an area of exercise of the citizenship and of debate about the common topics that preoccupied the citizens. Lechner (2002, p. 10) alerts us about the difficulties that it would generate considering that a list of private problems should shape a public sphere.

According to Rabotnikof (1993, p. 76) the public space can be considered to be a response to the demand of the community, as validity of the democracy or as part of a political culture. So the author indicates that: ‘The public space understood as the world in common, like space of appearance and as heritage or institutional inheritance that constitutes this community should articulate these lacks generated by an intensive, traumatic and exclusive modernization (Rabotnikof 1993, p. 90)’.

Traditionally associated with the State and with its institutions, in the twenty first-century the public space is transformed in the field of exercise of the citizenship. Speaking about citizenship it is necessary to remember that the concept already turns out to be related to that of community in the Athenian democracy during the fifth century bc. However at present, citizenship cannot be simply considered to be a legal status defined by a set of rights and obligations, but must be considered also in terms of identity and expression of belonging to a political community (Kymlicka, 1996). In this sense, Castillo García (2007) says that the processes of configuration of the civil space derive from the ways in which people relate and from the forms in which they construct their life in the community. The idea of community allows to visualize individuals as subjects and in this sense it is worth to recall Lechner (2002) when he indicates that politics is also subjective and is an inter-subjective field of relations of conflict.

In the past decades in Latin America, cities and their surroundings have grown in an intensive and enormous way, containing in small spaces a great number of persons who are characterized by their cultural heterogeneity. At the same time the arrival of migrant populations from the rural zones and/or of bordering countries who have arrived traditionally looking for work and to improve their living conditions has taken place; hereby not only new neighborhoods have arisen but the

existing ones have super filled, and along this process the concept of community has been modified.

This new century shows such characteristics as the crisis of the old model of socialization, based on the sociableness quagmire and the frequentness of the public spaces, as typical places of meeting between the different social groups (Svampa 2002, p. 89). It is at this time that the inhabitants of these cities, as Seibold said (1999, pp. 472–473), are learning to walk and circulate along anonymous spaces (streets, squares, stations of trains, shopping, markets, shops), places quite different from those that were daily passed in their original communities, in their belonging places, where the persons lived and interacted.

The neighborhood is a social space that makes possible the coordination and representation of the community practices, influencing the construction of mental maps of appropriation of the territory. It is a container space of elaborated significances of historical form and which a community partner generates recognition. It shapes the intermediate instance between the private housing and the public city, being a common space of relations and social networks with own logics influenced from the territory, which appears not as a mere container of activities but as a fundamental element in the interaction with the social and economic activities (Lucero 2008, pp. 95–96).

By virtue of these descriptions, the proposal centers on recovering the community as a space of face-to-face relations, returning to the first meaning of the word *comunitas* which shows that common is not the own thing, meaning that it begins where the own thing finishes. This concept concerns all and therefore it is of public character. This space is where the reciprocity or mutuality to give determines a commitment that is prevailing. In the ancient sense, the meaning of *communis* was that which shares a responsibility and *comunitas* was the set of people that have a duty while being members of a community (Espósito 2003, pp. 25–31).

In the nineteenth century, it arose in the university scene the first action that might be considered to be the precedents of the so-called “university extension”, associated with the expansion of the ideals of the French Revolution, with the organization of the first social fights and with the development of movements of vanguards in the artistic field (Baez Padrón 2010, p. 349). Thus the extension passed is to be considered at the end of the twentieth century as a function in the link between university and society with the integrating and revitalizing element in which both is mutually enriched (Mentioned by Baez Padrón 2010), centering its action in the cultural axis.

This new look brings over the role of university in its relation with community and as a configuration of a new space in which the transmission of scientific knowledge is in relation with human development, placing the process of construction of citizenship at the center of the scene.

Hence it is necessary to remember Sen (2000) when he expresses that access to education and health are both social opportunities that any State that is defined as a democracy must really guarantee to its citizens. From this point of view university is identified as one of the public spaces of construction and exercise of citizenship

that is characterized by the existence of public debate and by respect to the differences.

The university is an autonomous institution, and at the same time it is linked with the structure and the characteristics of the society to which it belongs. However, if the university institution was only looking inward, it would lose part of its social role, the one that relates to the outward view. These times require a university compromised with the community life, with the citizens' needs who live together, with the exercise of a democratization role of the knowledge based on the principles that admit that knowledge is constructed socially and on the basis of the respect to the diversities of every human group.

We depart from the idea of conceiving university as a social institution of reference to the subjects that live and pass in it their daily life, which implies considering it much more than a place of construction and reproduction of knowledge, because it is necessary to see it also as a space of socialization and construction of effective citizenship. Although the concept of citizenship turns out to be historically related to that of community—since the idea that the citizen was a member of a political community was born with the Athenian democracy during the fifth century BC—at present, citizenship cannot any more be simply considered to be a legal status defined by a set of rights and obligations, but must be considered also in terms of identity and expression of belonging to a political community, since the processes of configuration of the civil thing derive from the ways in which the persons relate and of the forms in which they construct their life in the community (Castillo García 2007).

If we consider university as an organization which is a member of the community and interacts as a social actor in the development process, we must consider that its activities must be developed not only in the university buildings but in the community as well. In this way we can identify the active role of the university in the construction of a situational diagnosis of community necessities. As Max Neef et al. (1986) pointed out needs are always “social” more than “individual”.

In this community scene the need arises to study the quality of life of different groups that live there, considering not only the material environment (social well-being) but also the psychosocial environment, based on the experience and evaluation that every person has of their own vital situation, and implying two axes of analysis: the aim and the subjective one. It is so, that quality of life presents us with the possibility of a new theoretical look, tending to work from the potentials more than from the lacks and with a community anchorage that the political partner includes the analysis of the context. For this particular perspective, the person traditionally considered as the object happens to be considered as the ‘subject and protagonist’ because the quality of life raises a social reality and politics based necessarily on the respect to the human rights, placing before the need to be employed at an integrated form (Tonon 2003).

We need actual decisions that really relate university with community since the development of integral and conjoint actions. From this perspective that integrates the concepts of university, community, citizenship and quality of life we have thought of UNI-COM's construction, executive unit tending to the achievement of

the development of the relations of our Faculty with the community (<http://unicom.unlzsociales.com.ar>).

UNI-COMs is oriented to the:

- a. Development of community diagnoses that bear in mind the perspective of the protagonists, tending to be considered by the state organizations of generation of public policies, as innovative information to the methodologies of traditional type.
- b. Construction of a guide of resources of the community in permanent update.
- c. Development of an area of studies dedicated to the quality of life of Asia and Africa population in Latin America.
- d. Organization of courses oriented to the members of the communities and students and teachers of our Faculty.
- e. Generation of a new space for training in research and development of community works for students of degree and postgraduate courses of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora.
- f. Collaboration with other national and international centers dedicated to the community relations.
- g. Organization of national and international Congresses and Conferences referred to the topic.
- h. Possibility to researchers and postgraduate students who are developing their thesis on the topic, both of our academic unit and of other academic units of the country and the region.
- i. Edition of periodic, virtual and graphical publications, to show the productions that are generated as a result of the works.

The three main UNI-COM projects that are actually developing are:

A conjoint work between UNICOM and the course “Field I in Social Work”<sup>5</sup>, that allows university students incorporate to the pre-professional performance the specific elements of the community research logic, articulating those techniques operated in the practice of community social work, contributing to the systematized knowledge of social reality and the specific transformations of community. To do this it is being arranged the formalization of a practice center where university students develop and partner the function of a community library, consulted with enthusiasm by children who assist the institution. We worked with children who need extra school support and come to do exercises and motivation of lecture and writing that becomes a contribution and complement of great impact in the protection process and integral protection of children. During the second semester of 2010, it was developed in the project “A library to fulfill our dreams” that counted with the active participation of 10 mothers and a father, because of what has been considered the possibility of potentiating the participation of adults who are responsible for children. Thus, the knowledge of concepts and realities of

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Miguel Meza leads this project.



families in their community context, feeds back a circuit that makes stronger research, analysis and performance' capacities and at the same time, showed the importance the university has in the defense and building of the construction of citizenship.

The other experience with university students is the study of alternative strategies of professional performance in the community field from the view of participation and exercise of citizenship of children and young people. In this sense UNI-COM organized a Community Resources Guide<sup>6</sup> that could be consulted through the site and contents state institutions, private ones and NGOs dedicated to childhood and young people, which is permanently updated.

The third project is the Area of Asia and Africa studies.<sup>7</sup> The production of knowledge about diversity in general and ethnic diversity in particular, puts us in a permanent ethical reflection while knowledge and its ethic are essential for intercultural dialog. The objectives of this area are the description and analysis of the immigrants' social and political dynamics, their perceptions about their quality of life and the inter-ethnic relations in the society in general and educational and work spaces in particular, in Latin America and especially in Argentina.

## 4.5 The Importance to Teach and Research Quality of Life at University

There are several initiatives in relation to the study of quality of life in the academic sphere. These initiatives include establishing university Quality of life research centers, developing Quality of life research graduate minor programs, developing a Quality of life research academic degree program, and developing Quality of life research academic courses (Sirgy et al. 2008). In Argentina and since the beginning of this century I organized two different experiences in relation to the study of quality of life.

a. The Research Program in Quality of life of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, Argentina.

In 2004, I organized the *Research in quality of life Program* in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, Argentina, and at the same time I began to teach quality of life as one of the contents in the course Community Social Work in the career of Social Work at this university.

The objectives of the *Research in quality of life Program* are:

- To develop research in the different areas of the study of quality of life, considering people's view and with the intention of being considered by policy

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Sebastian Rinaldi leads this project.

<sup>7</sup> Dra.Lía Rodríguez de la Vega leads this project.

makers as an innovative information in comparison with the traditional data about social welfare.

- To interact and collaborate with other international research centers dedicated to quality of life.
- To generate an integrated academic-research space for university students.
- To offer a scientific space of interaction for researchers of different regions of the world.
- To produce scientific publications dedicated to quality of life.
- To organize national and international Congresses and Conferences dedicated to the study of quality of life.

The Program has produced different kinds of scientific products:

- Research projects organized in two lines in relation with quality of life:
  - Young people quality of life: *Quality of life and future images of young university students* (2010–2011). *Quality of life of young people living in South Great Buenos Aires: public participation and access to health* (2005–2006). *A quality of life improvement strategy: university as a social integration space for students* (2005). *Young people quality of life in South Great Buenos Aires* (2004).
  - Labor quality of life: *Specific elements of burn out syndrome of social-work professionals in Argentina* (2008–2009). *Quality of life of social workers: the importance of the context variables* (2007).
- Books dedicated to quality of life studies.<sup>8</sup>
- Visits of post-graduate students of universities of different countries.
- Participation in international scientific networks.<sup>9</sup>
- Organization of National and Latin-American Conferences.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tonon (compiladora) (2010) *Calidad de vida y derechos de niños, niñas y jóvenes en América Latina*. Lomas de Zamora, UNLZ- CWI.

Tonon (compiladora) (2010) *Comprender las relaciones: calidad de vida, comunidad, niñez y desarrollo en América Latina*. Colección Cuadernos de estudio de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Lomas de Zamora, UNLZ.

Tonon (compiladora). (2006) *Juventud y protagonismo ciudadano*. Bs. As. Espacio Editorial.

<sup>9</sup> International Society of Quality of Life Studies [www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org).

International well-being group <http://acqol.deakin.edu.au>.

Latin American Research Network of Childwatch International <http://www.uam.mx/cdi/redesinv/participantes.html>.

<sup>10</sup> V Conferencia Latinoamericana de Childwatch Research Network-III Jornada del Programa de Investigación en Calidad de Vida. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales. Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, 2009.

II Jornada del Programa de Investigación en Calidad de Vida. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales. Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, 2007.

I Jornada del Programa de Investigación en Calidad de Vida. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales. Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, 2006.

b. The Doctoral Course *Research in Quality of life* at the Universidad de Palermo, Argentina.

In 2009, I began to teach quality of life in the Psychology Doctoral Program of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Universidad de Palermo, Argentina.<sup>11</sup>

This doctoral course is called *Research in quality of life* and its contents are: the evolution of the concept of quality of life, methods and techniques for the study of quality of life (quantitative and qualitative), community quality of life, health related quality of life, and public policies and quality of life. The syllabus of the course can be found in the webpage of the *International Society of Quality of Life Studies* ([www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org)).

Two of the first doctoral students of this course are now developing their doctoral thesis in relation with quality of life and I have been appointed as their director. One is a study of the satisfaction with community life of young people in an urban and a rural community in Argentina and the other a study of the quality of life of High school students and their satisfaction with life in the country in Venezuela.

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<sup>11</sup> I am thankful about this decision to Dr. Alejandro Castro Solano.

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# Chapter 5

## The Use of Qualitative Methods in the Study of Young People's Quality of Life

The importance of using qualitative methodology in quality of life studies is related to the importance of considering people's perceptions, opinions, feelings, ideas and interpretations. In this chapter we will propose a special view of qualitative methodology for the study of quality of life, considering that this kind of approach is essential to understand people's experiences of wellbeing and to discover new issues related with quality of life field.

### 5.1 Development and Characteristics of Qualitative Studies

When we speak about qualitative methodology we must remember the work of the Chicago School, particularly the development of ethnographic studies at the beginning of the twentieth century from 1920 to 1940. But the advance of quantitative methods from 1940 to 1960 produced the decline of qualitative methods until 1967, when the first text which tried to define this methodology was edited in Chicago: *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, by Glaser and Strauss. Meantime, in Europe, the qualitative methodology was developed in relation to the importance of hermeneutics in German social philosophy, the life history method in France and sociology in Italy (Fielding 2005).

Qualitative methods became fashionable again in the 1980s and this tendency raised during the 1990s, with the increase of qualitative methodological texts in Europe and USA and its development in Latin American countries, especially in relation to the use of participatory methods.

Camfield et al. (2008, p. 5) produced a review of the contribution of qualitative methods to exploring concepts and experiences of wellbeing among children and adults living in developing countries. The authors presented Ethnographic method, considering that Ethnography is a research methodology that is grounded and

flexible, and capable of generating new and surprising information about the way in which people see the world (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

But when we speak about qualitative methods we are not only speaking about ethnography, hermeneutics or grounded theory. We find another method to analyze qualitative data, that is, the thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was first defined by Boyatzis (1998) as a process for encoding qualitative information and then by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within data.

The main purposes of using qualitative methods are to understand the meaning for participants in the study of the events, situations and actions in which they are involved, the context in which participants act and the influence of it on their actions and the process in which the actions take place, and at the same time enable the identification and generation of new theory (Maxwell 1996).

These kinds of studies are organized from ideas generated in relation with the importance of the analysis of the issue, with a core and keys of interpretation, where the construction of hypothesis is not needed.

The qualitative research design is an interactive model with interconnected and flexible structure. The connections among the different components of the model are not rigid rules or fixed implications, they allow elasticity to the design (Maxwell 1996, p. 6).

Qualitative methods also work best when they are used by trained and experienced researchers working in the local language/s in a community where some rapport has already been established (Camfield et al. 2009, p. 5).

The samples in qualitative studies are not pre-specified and they can evolve during the field work. The researcher localizes the subjects, groups and initial scenarios to be studied, depending on the objectives and goals of the research project and the theory and concepts that supported the study. The criteria for the selection of the subjects are: diversity, accessibility, saturation and strategic selection.

## 5.2 The Role of Theory in Qualitative Studies

Theory has a fundamental role in qualitative studies. The concept is the expression of a term (word) the meaning of which is declared by definitions, which is related with reference. The relation meaning-reference: gives limits, reduces ambiguity and defines what is included and what is excluded. The concept can be seen as a theory system element, as a research instrument or as a simple data container.

The extension of a concept is the kind of things to which it is applied (denotation) and leads to the totality of objects. The intensity of a concept is the group of properties that sets its applicability (connotation), so to augment the extension, you have to reduce intensity. When you reduce properties and attributes it becomes more general. In the other extreme, to descend in the abstraction scale, it is necessary to add attributes, augmenting specificity (Sartori 1984).

The contextual concept is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform the research. It is a formulation of what the researcher thinks is going on with the phenomena he/she is studying that is to say a tentative theory of what is happening and what is not (Maxwell 1996, p. 25).

The contextual concept is not found, it is constructed by the researcher from the different theories he/she studied, the previous research developed in the area and the first experiences of the researcher. In this consideration the contextual concept is different from the traditional idea of considering only the previous scientific systematized knowledge about the research problem.

The elaboration of the conceptual context implies the development of a group of stages. To begin, it is necessary to differentiate between the information and the knowledge the researcher has about the research problem he/she built. That is the moment in which he/she looks for in physical or virtual text libraries: books, scientific articles, research reports, among others, considering those that give the state of the art of the subject as well as those that correspond to a bigger knowledge context about it.

### **5.3 The Techniques in Qualitative Studies: The Semi-structure Interview**

The techniques used in qualitative studies are related to the objectives of those studies. We agree with Vélez Restrepo (2005, pp. 24–25) when she points out that assigning the techniques the static or quantitative function of being simple collectors of information, means to restrain their possibilities as sense generators, considering that techniques are generators of situation and acts of communication and allow the reading, understanding and analysis of subjects, contexts and social situations where action happens.

The decision of using a specific technique relates to the election of the research object and in this sense, we consider Bourdieu's definition (2008, p. 17) when he says that every object carries a point of view, even considering an object produced to abolish the point of view, it means bias.

In the case of semistructured interview, it is a technique that facilitates the free manifestation of subjects, their formative interests (spontaneous memory), believes (expectations and value orientations about the received information) and wishes. In this way, spontaneous discourses make emerge, beyond its informal appearance, complex, diffused and covert relations of sense, which set them in their own global and concrete significant context (Ortí 1986).

Semistructured interview is defined as a research technique, but it is more than this; it is an encounter between subjects that facilitate the understanding and analysis of subjects, contexts and social situations, generating at the same time acts and situations of communication. This position throws away the reductionist and traditional view that considers the semistructured interview only as a simple tool for collecting data (Tonon 2009a, p. 71).

The decision of using semistructured interviews is related to the decision of a flexible design for the research in which persons are real protagonists, emphasizing the study of social phenomena in the places in which they happen and considering the significance actor gives to facts and situations (Tonon 2009a, p. 72).

Data collection is a process in which the researcher selects empirical phenomena in relation to its relevance to the main research questions. During the field work in qualitative studies, different people meet each other: the research subject and the researcher. So it is necessary to consider the feelings and emotions involved and constructed between them (Tonon 2009a). This scenario needs the trust that stimulates the collaboration and allows the subject interviewed to reduce the uncertainty in the circumstances. The same confidentiality is needed to preserve the intimate and secret information the subject conveys (Tonon 2009a).

It happens that people interviewed “move” themselves from the subject about which they are being asked and talk about another subject, relevant or needed to be explicit for them, even more, in the case of some interviewed this return to the subject that is important for them is recurrent. This is the moment when the expertise of the researcher takes action, trying to build a space to get the information he/she is looking for, avoiding the interviewed to feel the researcher is not considering and giving value to the information he/she is giving because he/she considers it important.

From that point, the need is to build a stage, defined as every social interaction situation with co-presence, to which diverse components are inherent, meaning: a concrete spatial location, a concrete temporal interval and concrete subjects that interact (Sotolongo Codina and Delgado Díaz 2006).

In this type of interviews the research work can be organized in thematic axis or oriented questions. The idea is to generate a dynamic and flexible communication in which the person interviewed is able to answer using his/her own logic of communication. That is to say that even if the researcher makes some questions that defines the area to investigate, he/she can go deeper in some other matters that is considered relevant, making the decision of asking some more questions (Tonon 2009a, pp. 63–66).

With the interview, the researcher wants to access the perspective of the person interviewed, discovering his/her own mental categories, feelings and the causes of his/her actions (Corbetta 2003, p. 70). It structures an informative reciprocal process, formed as a dialog, in which each speech phrase acquires a meaning in its own concrete context, allowing to reveal the underlying ideology system in the system of the speaking language (Ortí 1986).

The research interview is an encounter between two subjects, in which the researcher speaks as less as possible and he/she limits himself/herself to stimulate the person interviewed to speak. Concerning the language used by the researcher, this can change from subject to subject, always keeping in essence what the researcher wants to ask. This language adaptation, made by the researcher, wants to facilitate the interviewed person the understanding of the subject and at the same time give “proximity” between each other.



In the semistructured interview, the researcher gives the interviewed full freedom of speech, thus highlighting his/her point of view. He tries to keep the interest of the person interviewed, playing an active role in the search of his/her memories and reflections without losing his/her concentration.

Although the researcher has a script of the subjects that has to be considered during the interview, the order in which they are considered or the way he/she formulates them are decisions of the researcher (Corbetta 2003, p. 82). Clearly the semistructure interview would not be possible if the researcher does not develop his/her abilities of understanding and interpretation at the moment of the interview.

## 5.4 The Qualitative Researcher

In qualitative studies the process begins with the researcher's recognition of his or her own socio-cultural and historical position, which implies ethics and politics in connection with the research (Gianturco 2005). The qualitative researcher works with "objects" that are really "subjects", as they are human beings with their own world and observations immersed in social reality (Schutz 1974).

The qualitative researcher is expected to feel personally involved in every step of the research process because every consideration and decision will have to be based entirely on personal grounds (Fink 2000). Doing qualitative research requires the researcher to be methodologically versatile, to have extensive knowledge of theory, to be persistent and focused in the research and to be able of conceptualize, write and communicate (Morse and Field 1995). This scenario needs the trust that stimulates the collaboration and allows the subject interviewed to reduce the uncertainty in the circumstances. At the same time confidentiality is needed to preserve the intimate and secret information the subject conveys (Tonon 2009a).

## 5.5 The Registration of the Information

To obtain the information from a semistructure interview, it is recommended to use a recording device, with previous authorization for its use by the person interviewed. Although counting on the recording, it is important for the researcher to register spontaneous impressions at the same time the person interviewed is speaking. At present, the use of video cameras has been added to obtain the images of the interview too.

The fact that the interview is personal, face-to-face between the researcher and the person interviewed, allows the first one to get facial expressions and gestures that facilitate the post interpretation of words. This is the reason why researchers go to interviews, with a field notebook to write notes, besides the script of the interview. These field notes, written while the interviewed is speaking does not distract him/her but allows the researcher to generate associative networks at the moment of the analysis of the information.

Thus, the semistructure interview gives a key place to observation and that is the way the researcher is aware of what is happening with the person interviewed, not only considering what he/she says but also the way he/she says it, detecting the emotions implied in his/her oral expressions.

The notes the researcher writes can be methodological or personal. In the case of personal notes, Corsaro (1985) defines them as the ones that serve to capture feelings, personal opinions and the sensations and reactions of the researcher about the object of study. Whereas the methodological notes are those of interpretative character that form part of the first scientific appreciations of the researcher and that will be considered by him/her at the analysis moment, these being, the first clues he/she has.

Memory also plays an important role, concept that according to Cellini (2008) leads to the mechanism by which information stays available for a time, with the opportunity to be used. Thus, memory does not imply a simple act of reproduction, but it is an act of reconstruction in which the subject remembers in a selective way and in relation to the events he/she previously know and are significant for his/her own experience. So, the material memorized is not neutral, but can be more or less familiar to the person, its significance being more or less deep (Cellini 2008). It is necessary to remember the concept of acquits of knowledge statement by Schutz (1974) that encompasses the typing of the world full of sense built by each subject and that forms his/her accumulated experience, which allows he/she to operate in new situations.

Then, it is necessary that the researcher writes the complementary information he/she observed and thought during the interview which is considered significant for him/her avoiding the passage of time that can lead to forgetting or modifying this data.

## 5.6 The Analysis Process

When the work of carrying out the interviews is finished, it is necessary to rerecord them. At this moment the researcher begins the work of analysis of the data obtained which makes him/her to take more decisions. The reading of all the answers conducted him/her to the way of beginning the classification and construction of categories. This is because the semistructured interview is a technique characterized by its flexibility, so the data obtained is codified when the field work is finished and from an inductive way.

This process begins with the rerecord of the interviews and the transcription of them. In coincidence with Fink (2000) we agree that transcription is a continuum that integrates sounds and silences at the same time that the answers of the people interviewed, and in this sense transcription in qualitative studies cannot be considered in the same way as that of transcription in quantitative studies.

In qualitative analysis the researcher works in two dimensions and in a circle way, he/she not only observes and registers the data, but also at the same time he/she has a permanent dialog with the research subject characterized by a systematic

and analytic reflection between what he/she captures in the field and what he/she really looks for (Ruiz and e Ispizúa, 1989, p. 21).

As Strauss (1987, p. 29) said, in qualitative research the goal of coding is not to produce counts of things but to fracture the data with the objective of arranging it into categories to facilitate the comparison between data and categories for the development of theoretical concepts. During this part of the process the researcher discovers similarities in people discourses that allow him/her the organization of the data in significant groups for the construction of categories.

In qualitative studies there is no previous codification process; the researcher must go deep into the empiric reality and from facts and words to concepts. In this sense concepts and theory structures confront with additional empirical information during the research, in a conceptually and theoretically careful process that leads to deeper levels of abstraction (Bericart 1998, p. 82).

The researcher begins reading the information in detail, considering not only the literal transcriptions of the interviews, but also at the same time the personal notes he/she registered during the interviews and the other ones that spontaneously emerge when interviews had finished because probably both of them constituted his/her first intuitions about themes. Maxwell (1996) says that it is in this very moment when the researcher begins to visualize the first categories to analyze.

The codification process is the time when the researcher discovers similitudes and differences among people's discourses that allow the organization of data in significant groups for the construction of categories. When the categorization is finished, it is contrasted with the theoretical concepts that supported the study with the objective of discovering significances.

The development of this process allows the researcher to construct a final report of his/her work so that it will not be a simple group of data collected, and becomes an analytic text.

There are different methods to analyze the information collected in qualitative studies and "thematizing meanings" (Holloway and Todres 2003) as one of the skills a qualitative researcher must develop. In this case we decided to use thematic analysis, defined first by Boyatzis (1998) as a process for encoding qualitative information, "..... used as part of many qualitative method, considers that is not a separate method but something to be used to assist the researcher in the search of insight" (Boyatzis 1998, p. 6).

We have chosen Braun and Clarke's proposals of thematic analysis (2006, p. 79) who define it as "...a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail".

*"Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the way in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society"* (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 81).

As the purpose of using qualitative methods is to understand the meaning for participants in the context in which they are involved, and at the same time to

identify new concepts, we propose qualitative methodology in studying the quality of life, considering that this kind of approach is essential in understanding people's experiences of wellbeing.

## 5.7 Validity and Importance of Qualitative Studies

Last decades showed the advantage of using the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and in this sense people answered to open questions crossed with demographic variables, and facilitated the understanding of the particular situations of the different groups that live in the community (Santos et al. 2007).

While using qualitative methods, validity is relative; it has to be assessed in relation to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions (Maxwell, 1996, p. 86). The validation involves not only a theoretical questioning of the nature of the phenomena investigated but also a questioning of the methods. The credibility of the researcher, based on the quality of his or her past research in the area, becomes an important aspect in assessing the validity of the study (Kvale 1996, p. 10).

Qualitative studies are dedicated to the discovery and identification of new issues, and they are characterized for the construction of empirical evidence and theorization in an interactive process. The importance of using qualitative methodology in quality of life studies is related to the importance of considering people's perceptions, opinions, feelings, ideas and interpretations.

The future prospects for qualitative research include the major formalization of the methods; development of data analysis; the marriage between computers and qualitative research introducing qualitative software in the analysis of the data; the necessity of using qualitative methods in a multicultural society and the implications for applied research (Gobo 2005). At the same time it is vital that university curricula include the teaching of qualitative methods to enable students to understand research problems in holistic way.

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## Chapter 6

# Conclusions

The social representations, about youth that each population has in each historical moment, are embedded in the social context in which young people live and develop, conditioning everyday life and/or creating related stereotypes; in this way, the concept of youth is a social construction built conjointly by all members of society in the historical moment in which they live.

In concordance with Casas (1999) we will say that today quality of life implies the participation of citizens in the process of evaluation of the things that affected them. In this way, it is a concept with political significance that contributes to the study of people's wellbeing from the physical and psychological perspective that relates material needs with socio-affective needs and integrates psychological and social measurements of perceptions and evaluations of people's own experiences.

The process of construction of citizenship remits to people the intention to build and generate new realities to reach what they think as desirable and possible (Castillo García 2007). In the case of young people, what they need in order to feel satisfied varies according to the different societies, especially considering that most of them live in a fragile situation. As Cortina (2003, p. 79) states, the idea of citizenship always transcends individualism because a citizen is someone who exists together with others and those others are equal to him before the city, is somebody who deliberates with others, acts with others conjointly, and assumes the protagonist role of his own life. In this way a citizen is not only one who the law protects, but also one who participates in public issues.

Community and university are presented today as two scenarios that facilitate the construction of citizenship and the improvement of young people's quality of life, if we understand the concept "scenario" as a social interaction situation in which co-exist subjects that interact with each other in a concrete, temporal and geographical locality (Sotolongo and Delgado 2006).

The concept of community has changed, and today it is considered as the traditional view of belonging to a geographical place transforming its conceptualization in

terms of the relations people maintain in some kind of space, whether it is a concrete or a virtual one (Tonon 2009).

University has amplified its traditional role of production and reproduction of scientific knowledge, changing to be an interaction space in the diversity as a social institution of reference for people who develop it in their daily life. University gives students (and teachers) the possibility of feeling a sense of identity that grows up in terms of integration.

In our studies the access to university has been recognized by students as a way to improve their quality of life. At the same time the protagonist role assigned to job as a vehicle of improvement of quality of life and as an element of the interaction process of construction of citizenship appeared in young people's discourses.

Speaking in methodology terms the study of quality of life proves to be more complete if quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Quantitative methods allow the knowledge of objective conditions but qualitative methods are the ones that make possible the discovery of people's feelings, perceptions and opinions in a deeper way.

The particular perspective of each individual mediates the effect of social relationships and how they relate to the environment, that is, the way in which each subject interprets his context and situation; that is why the particular perspective of each individual is the key that determines the quality of life (Patrick et al. 2002).

Finally, we will say that quality of life presents a new theoretical possibility that leads us to work recognizing people potentialities more than the lack of them, from a community point of view that includes the social-politic analysis of the context. In this framework the person traditionally considered as "an object of the study" becomes a "subject and protagonist of the study". And in this way it establishes a social and political reality based on the respect of human rights making us work in an integrated way (Tonon 2003).

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