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Young People's Quality of Life and Construction of Citizenship (SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality of Life Research)

Graciela Tonon

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The study of quality of life refers to the material environment (social welfare) and psychosocial environment (wellbeing). It has been defined as a concept that implies the objective and subjective dimension that Cummins (1997) first studied in seven domains. The use of domains in the quality of life study 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 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 that 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). oung people do not form a homogenous group and, in this sense, it is not possible to generalize about youth; they interact with the environment in which they live and they are a product of the history they happen to live, in this way they transit different vital scenarios in daily life that affect their quality of life. 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 every-day life and /or creating related stereotypes. 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 interact with the environment in which they live and they are a product of the history they happen to live. Authors like Urresti (1999) 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 live. Nowadays the predominant adult model is based in individualism, and even if an intergenerational dialogue is necessary, it is difficult for young people to achieve this kind of communication with adults that, in some cases, are living “stages of youth” or that need to be “forever young”. 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. In the other side the process of globalization and the protagonist social role of the new informational and communicational technologies, produce that the possibilities to expand individual freedoms increase, but not all young people can manage with it (Lechner, 2002). What young people need in order to construct their citizenship and feel satisfied, varies according to the different societies, especially considering that most of them live a fragile situation. As Cortina (2003:7-9) states, the idea of citizenship always transcends individualism, because the citizen is somebody that exists together with others, and those others are equal to him before the city, is somebody that deliberates with others, that acts with others conjointly, that assumes the protagonist role of his own life, in this way citizen is not only that who the law protects, but that who participates in the public issues. Speaking about young people we propose to recognize them from their equal dignity because “recognition is not only a courtesy that we owe others: it is an essential human need” (Taylor, 1993:46). This recognition is based in 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 (Gutman, 1993:20).

This brief book is dedicated to analyze the relations between quality of life and construction of citizenship of young people in Argentina, considering two specific social scenarios: the community and the university. In the case of community it is important to note that it 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 his traditional role of production of knowledge, to be an institution of social reference and social support for students. To do this the author will show some of the results of a decade of research in quality of life and young people, using quantitative and qualitative methods.

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