

EN

VOL. 5. N° 9

AN INTRODUCTION TO “YOUTH, PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCES IN THE CITY”

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Some common threads

The four articles published in the Ágora section of this edition respond to the call for research articles (paraphrasing the original CfP) exploring how young people experience and act in the urban spaces they live in, how they recreate them and construct contemporary cities. Emphasis was also placed on studies applying participatory methodologies and new forms of documenting and carrying out research with/about young people and adolescents in the city. We considered that a call for submissions within these parameters would also provide a platform for research using visual, multimodal and sensorial methodologies and/or digital resources, as well as qualitative and/or ethnographic studies. More broadly, the call aimed to share research that places the experiences and voices of adolescents and young people in urban contexts at the centre of analysis.

Finally, despite the current pressure on the academic community to channel their work towards high-impact journals, often with restricted access and in the hands of multinational publishing conglomerates, we hoped to bring together articles that would reflect the diversity of social, economic, cultural and institutional conditioning factors, with particular attention to the geographical and disciplinary diversity that may be represented in the set of proposals.

The call had some success in this regard, and the kult-ur editorial team received proposals with research undertaken in a wide range of national contexts, through multiple disciplinary lenses and on a variety of issues. The final selection of articles included in this monograph section reflects this diversity. However, a series of common threads also runs through the articles, which we briefly explore in this introduction. We consider it is useful to unravel and identify these common coordinates more specifically, since they emerge after reading the collection of completely independent articles in its entirety, and may therefore also help to identify some of the questions that are shaping current (and future) research on youth and urban experience. With this premise, we believe there are (at least) two main transversal threads running through the articles.

Firstly, mobility and displacement (Urry, 2000; Urry and Sheller, 2006) occupy a central place in the analysis of the papers presented and in the construction of the urban experience of the studies' participants. The presence of mobility clearly ties in with the core logics of contemporary social theory, including (although not exclusively) the use of sensorial methodologies and perspectives that highlight the construction of the experience in/through displacement (Arias, 2017; Pink, 2008). Yet what is interesting about the contributions published here is the way they bring to the table the complexity and multidimensionality of a mobility-centred perspective:

(a) They demonstrate the diversity of the spatial-temporal scales (Slembrouck, 2010; Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen, 2015; Lemke, 2000) that come into play in considerations of displacement. Hence, we are informed about movements involving transnational/global journeys of both 'social agents' (as in the analysis of a rap artist's migratory biography by Victor Corona and Cristina Aliagas-Marín) and of 'expressive movements' (well illustrated in Akeem Ayofe Akinwale's conceptual review of youth-music movements in Africa) —a distinction that is easily problematised since all movement involves social agents and practices, and it is only a question of where the author places his or her analytical emphasis that brings one or the other to the fore. But there is also an empha-



sis on more intimate and local displacement (Valentine, 2008), constituted by the movements and appropriations of space within the city, including the creation of micro-spaces (illustrated in the work of Anne-Lene Sand and Nadia Hakim-Fernández on electronic music events in the city). Moreover, these levels are not independent and there is also room for an analytical approach that attempts to untangle the intersection between transnational migratory movements and the daily experiences and paths taken by young people in the city (as in the article by Karnele Mendoza and Marta Morgade about unaccompanied migrant minors).

(b) They call attention to the generative dimension of mobility, around the expressive practices implied in them, the materiality of these practices and their social organisation. Examined in these terms, we may consider the studies to be located at different points on various analytical continua —again, in the knowledge that these continua can be used to organise a possible reading of the articles and that they can be easily deconstructed. On the one hand is the continuum between the ‘ephemeral’ and the ‘crystallised/enduring’. In this line, the article by Sand and Hakim-Fernández explores situated, momentary (ephemeral) practices and emerging, intermittent forms of sociability, whereas Akinwale examines social-expressive movements that, from his perspective, are more consolidated and lasting in form —and that can therefore be targeted by different social and economic policies. On the other hand is an analytical continuum running from ‘biographical trajectories’ (e.g. the case study by Corona and Aliagas-Marín) to ‘social-youth movements’ (as in Akinwale’s analysis of secondary sources), with a more ethnographically situated analysis centred on relationship networks and specific participant groups (reflected in the articles by Mendoza and Morgade, and Sand and Hakim-Fernández) in between. It should be noted that this latter continuum does not imply the reproduction of distinctions between the ‘individual’ and the ‘social-cultural’, since even when the emphasis falls on individual expressive practices (as in the analysis of the lyrics of the rap artist discussed by Corona and Aliagas-Marín) this view incorporates different cultural, political and aesthetic layers.

Secondly, although this was not explicitly included in the original call, in their discussion of the youth-city intersection three of the articles centre their analysis on music —on this point, moreover, while Mendoza and Morgade’s article on unaccompanied migrant minors published here does not focus specifically on musical experiences/practices, their broader research reveals the important role music plays in the lives of the participants (Mendoza, 2017). From an empirical perspective, this presence only reaffirms the centrality of music in the life experiences and expressive interests of contemporary youth on a global scale (e.g. Thomson, Hall, Earl and Geppert, 2018). Nevertheless, there are also some noteworthy conceptual aspects concerning the way music emerges in these articles, albeit briefly and without deviating from the central theme of this monograph:

(a) ‘Musical’ is not confined to (indeed, we would say that it does not centre on) the sonorous experience/modality. The authors understand music from a much more social, sensorial, corporal and political perspective. Thus, music plays an important role in shaping the identities and relationship networks of the participants, it is constituted in performative events/spaces (which, as mentioned above, vary greatly in terms of their permanence) and form part of the fabric of political and economic relationships that young people establish in/with urban spaces.

(b) This diversity of perspectives on musical experience is reflected in the range of disciplinary approaches in the articles. The monograph includes papers in the textual sociolinguistic tradition, such as Corona and Aliagas-Marín’s analysis of a rap artist’s lyrics in the context of a broader ethnographic-linguistic study; others have a more obvious connection to urban anthropology and sensorial ethnography (such as Sand and Hakim-Fernández), or present an analytical synthesis of research from a more cultural/economic research perspective (Akinwale).

Presentation of contributions to the Àgora section: more methodological notes

The article ‘Adolescentes migrantes, cartografías, paseos por Bilbao y mapas soñados’ (Migrant teenagers, walks around Bilbao and mapping dreams) by Karnele Mendoza and Marta Morgade presents the results of a recently completed study on unaccompanied migrant minors (mainly from the north of Africa and the Maghreb) and the institutional facilities in which they are placed in the province of Bilbao (Spain). The broader research project from which this article comes is highly collaborative-participatory in that the fieldwork, questions and analytical themes are formulated with the participants within a framework closely linked to ethnographic experimental collaboration (Sánchez-Criado and Estalella, 2018). One particularly notable aspect of this paper is the collaborative space that the researchers create with the young unaccompanied migrants in a cultural institution —the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum— where they jointly produce a personal map of the city. This artefact enables the participants, together with the researchers, to reconstruct their migration experiences and transnational relationship networks, and narrate

their experiences in Bilbao more productively than would have been possible with more traditional social research methodologies, to which the institutionalised young people already have a strong aversion.

'Ephemeral socialities: Social navigation among young Danes', by Anne-Lene Sand and Nadia Hakim-Fernández, presents the results of a broad urban ethnography, in movement and with a prominent visual-sensorial component, centred on the encounters and activities of young people in two Danish cities with a 'hardstyle' electronic music scene. As mentioned above, one of the threads running through this research is the methodological and analytical challenge of studying the communities and networks of participants whose relationships and moments of sociability are relatively ephemeral and take place in a variety of places (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991); at the same time, the participants define these elements as constitutive of the type of community they form. In this context the authors demonstrate how an extended field relationship and multi-sited work allowed them to access—and unravel—this complexity.

The third article, 'El potencial de la música rap para explorar las experiencias en la ciudad de jóvenes migrantes: análisis de la producción musical de Rxnde Akozta' (The potential of rap music to explore young migrants' experiences in the city: a case study of Rxnde Akozta), by Victor Corona and Cristina Aliagas-Marín, offers a detailed analysis of the musical and migratory biography of a rap artist originally from Cuba but now settled in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. As mentioned above, this analysis focuses on the lyrics of the artist's key songs, in which he reflects on his life and musical experience through the cities that have formed part of his musical career (Havana, Helsinki, Caracas and L'Hospitalet de Llobregat-Barcelona). The analysis is thus based on an artefact of that is at the same time 'textual' (the lyrics), 'sonorous' (the CD) and 'visual/multimodal' (the YouTube video), although the analysis is not limited to this piece as an encapsulated element. Corona and Aliagas-Marín explain that the analysis is located in and benefits from a series of ethnographic-sociolinguistic investigations about young Latin Americans and hip-hop music in the area of Barcelona, and a long-standing personal relationship and professional collaboration with the artist.

This monograph section closes with the article 'Youth music production and consumption in Africa' by Akeem Ayofe Akinwale. Compared to the rest of the monograph, this contribution follows a somewhat different logic (but nonetheless just as interesting). The article's geographical scope is not one or several specific localities (e.g. Bilbao, Aarhus, Horsens, Havana, etc.), but rather it explores the set of key urban fabrics in contemporary Africa. Neither is the study based on empirical material gathered directly by the author; it is an analytical review of the literature available on the paper's subject. For readers in our immediate environment (Spain and Europe), this subject and literature is undoubtedly less familiar and opens the door to new perspectives and alternative interpretations. The author proposes a specific theoretical-conceptual framework for his analysis (Afrikology) and examines not only the aesthetic-expressive or political dimension of musical practices, but also the economic and employment opportunities they offer young people in contemporary African cities.

In sum, all these articles portray creative and original methodological procedures to tackle the diversity of conceptual and relational challenges arising in this field. The result is a set of articles that, individually, we believe provide data and analysis that are highly relevant to understanding aspects of young people's experience in the city today. Read together, they invite the reader to further explore some of the reflections we have identified in this introduction.

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