

"Today's youths are very creative, because they need to re-establish their lives on different patterns to those of the preceding generation"

Interview with Professor of Sociology, Benjamín Tejerina, author of the latest publication by the Basque Youth Observatory

The Basque Youth Observatory has just published "[Vital precariousness and Basque youths. Social conditions and biographical strategies to lead a normal life](#)". We are talking to Benjamin Tejerina, Director of the [Centre for the Study of Collective Identity](#) (CEIC) at the University of the Basque Country - Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea and study coordinator.

- This research examines precariousness from multiple aspects. What are those areas into which you have delved to define the state of today's youths?

In recent years, one specific dimension of precariousness has been studied above all others: the one that has to do with employment and working conditions. We have delved into issues such as the transition from education to the labour market, the degree of consistency between studies and employment, the conditions under which people leave the homes of their relatives with whom they have lived since they were children and the establishment of a new home.

We are familiar with many features regarding these processes, but other important dimensions have been overlooked. Therefore, we came up with the vital precariousness concept. The idea is to address the complexity of this phenomenon, as it affects employment and working conditions, but also the household, health, relationships with partners, social relationships and the involvement of young people in social and group life.

We are speaking of three basic dimensions: economic and labour, residential-body and relational-participatory. This approach has allowed us to understand how the lives of young people are seriously affected when their situation in one or more of these dimensions is good, but poor or very poor in others; and, conversely, situations that are extremely precarious regarding a given aspect can be compensated through help or support obtained in others.

Vital precariousness becomes a balancing act, always unstable, that young people are trying to achieve using different resources, with a view to compensating for imbalances and downs in life, especially when one is trying to fend for oneself. Research has attempted, first of all, to quantify how many young people are affected by each of these dimensions, and, secondly, to analyse what strategies they develop to overcome or mitigate the effects of the various precarious situations in which they are involved.

- The study suggests that "normalcy has been overcome by different aspects of precariousness, where precariousness becoming the norm". Does this mean that we can consider that young people, as a whole, find themselves in a precarious situation?

Based on the information available, we can establish two things: more and more people are affected by the type of precariousness that we call vital; and there are more and more young people who fall into this category. I couldn't say whether young people in general, and Basque youths in particular, live in a state of precariousness; but I can say, without a doubt, that there are more young people in a state of precariousness than a few years ago.

Some people might think that what I have just said is obvious, because we have been engaged in a severe crisis, of a type unheard of in this country's recent history, for five years. However, it would be wrong to attribute all the responsibility of the youth precariousness to the crisis. In fact, the living conditions of young people began to deteriorate before the crisis (wages, protection, rights, access to housing), but the improvement in some aspects (education, access to cultural resources, credit and consumption) didn't let us see what was happening below the surface.

What we considered normal until recently, a normal life, is becoming very difficult to achieve for many people, and something exceptional for most. Somehow, we have to get used to seeing precariousness as normal, as something that is part of the landscape of everyday life, not as something unusual. The generation that is, at present, moving towards adulthood, is undergoing a socialization process that will be marked by the widespread experience of various precarious situations.

This study comes up with a number of conclusions; among which we can highlight the great resilience and creativity of young people faced with social change. How do you see the future of youth emancipation in the current economic crisis?

Through meetings with groups of young people and personal interviews we have analysed the strategies put in place to accommodate these precarious situations, but also to resist and recover from them.

Today's youths are very creative, because they need to re-establish their lives on different patterns to those of the preceding generation. Some, or most, of the solutions used in the past are no longer working, are less effective today and, therefore, young people are faced with the need to innovate.

Some young people try to evade the situation, to find other ways of feeling well, to create safe havens. Most highly value friendship, being with colleagues, experimenting ways of being 'at home' but creating 'shared privacy' spaces, halfway between public and private, like youth centres, a very relevant phenomenon in the Basque Country. Here they come up with many projects that lead to entrepreneurial activities.

Finally, a very important sector of young people want to change a reality that they don't like: 15 M, occupation movements, mobilizations against neo-liberalism, such as the Alterglobal movement, Occupy Wall Street, student movements in Chile, #Yosoy132 in Mexico, the Arab Spring; these are just a few examples of collective action by young people who are dissatisfied with the reality they have to live.

Not only have strategies changed but also the paths towards emancipation are no longer linear: young people leave and come back, they come and go, they hold on for a long time until they find a way that is less difficult. Youth emancipation has become more complicated due to the added difficulties of

the current crisis. While public support weakens through the reduction in programmes and services, and the market becomes more complicated due to the difficulties of finding jobs and acceptable working conditions; solidarity within and between generations is becoming stronger.

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