

**YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
THE RECENT TRAJECTORY**

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the results of a collaborative survey which has traced the recent trajectory of youth and adult education (YAE) in twenty countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, drawing a cartography of the politics and programs of the governments and of the civil society. Based on an exam of the regional context, the work draws conclusions about the roles recently played by YAE and recognizes the plurality of particular social subjects which require this education modality. Characterization and comparison of policies and programs of such countries lead to the identification of common trends, exceptional cases and critical aspects

***YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION – EDUCATIONAL POLICIES – PUBLIC POLICIES –
LATIN AMERICA***

This paper has assembled information and owes a debt of gratitude and credit to the whole team that participated in the task and who are mentioned in the subsequent notes, especially the coordinators. The author, however, assumes full responsibility for the approach, the information selected and for the opinions herein expressed.

This paper assembles notes for a regional analysis of the situation regarding the education of young people and adults in Latin America, which were prepared from the results of unpublished collaborative research that was carried out in 20 countries on the continent in 2006 and 2007, a joint initiative of the Center for Regional Cooperation for the Education of Adults in Latin America and the Caribbean (*Crefal*) and the Council for the Education of Adults from Latin America and the Caribbean (*Ceaal*¹). The objective of the investigation was to go back over the recent course of history and trace an outline of the education of young people and adults in the region, by analyzing the policies and programs of government and civil society at the beginning of the third millennium.

The national studies, which were faced with a lack of organized and reliable information, were carried out by researchers from universities or non-governmental organizations, who were guided by a common research protocol that was prepared by four coordinators², who also supervised the work using distance communication tools.

There were five guiding axes for the research: the construction of the of young people's and adults' right to education, its links with the world of work and the generation of income, the training of educators, a consideration of the social and cultural diversity of the beneficiaries and the contribution it makes towards a reduction in poverty and sustainable development.

It is necessary to be warned of that fact that, despite certain social, environmental, historical, cultural and economic characteristics that they have in common, there is a great diversity between countries in the region which it will not always be possible to consider in this concise analysis.

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² Arles Caruso Larrainci (Uruguay), Maria Mercedes Ruiz Muñoz (Mexico), Miriam Camilo Recío (Dominican Republic) and the author of this work, with the support of Meynardo Vazquez Esquivel and Jorge Rivas, from *Crefal's* Research Department, based in Mexico.

THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT AND THE FUNCTION OF THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

The current design of the education of young people and adults Latin America and the Caribbean responds, on the one hand, to certain social, demographic, economic, political and educational processes that marked the continent in the second half of the 20th century, and on the other, to the challenges that were thrown down by the transition to the new millennium.

Throughout the 20th century, a demographic transition was observed in countries in the region in which the reduction in mortality rates, combined with high birth rates, intensified the pace of population growth, leading to a preponderance of groups of younger people in the population as a whole. At the end of the millennium, however, a reduction in the birth rate driven by a change in the roles performed by women in society and the family, combined with a increase in life expectancy, modified the age profile of the population, leading to a tendency whereby adults predominate in the populations in the majority of countries in the region³. This new age profile, combined with the process that redefines the social position of women, has important repercussions on the configuration of families, on the labor market and on the demand for social services, like health, education and social security.

Another socio-demographic phenomenon that had a major impact on social policies in general and on educational policies in particular was the extraordinary exodus from the countryside to the towns, which was witnessed in the second half of the 20th century, and the concentration of people in the large metropolises in the region.

The educational systems in Latin American and Caribbean countries responded to these socio-demographic changes by expanding public and free elementary education in a significant way and in recent times in urban areas there has been a tendency for universal access to elementary schools in infancy and adolescence. As a result of this process, there was a reduction in the gender disparity, which discriminated against women when it came to access to education, so much so that the distance between the generations in access to

³ As far as concerns the age structure of the population, there are various situations in the region, relating to different stages in demographic transition and the particular dynamic of its indigenous and non-indigenous populations. So, there are countries with relatively high fertility rates and a young population structure (Haiti, Guatemala, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras), alongside countries like Uruguay and Cuba, with low fertility rates and a high life expectancy, which are reflected in their old population structures (Chackiel, 2004).

educational opportunities has increased, putting adults and old people at a disadvantage vis-à-vis young people. The expansion of public education systems in social structures that are marked by pronounced cultural heterogeneity and deep economic inequality took place within the context of restricted public investment and led to selective and anachronistic teaching models, which had a negative impact on learning and school results, meaning that a significant proportion of the poor young people of the continent had the course of their education interrupted and fell significantly behind, academically.

In this context the education of young people and adults has been called upon to fulfill four main functions. First, this is an environment for welcoming rural immigrants (many of whom are of indigenous origin and whose mother tongue is not the one that dominates), who need to reassess their knowledge and ways of life, to redefine their social and cultural identity and to learn new behaviors and acquire cultural codes in order to become part of the literate urban society. In doing so they need to overcome the prejudices that restrict them from enjoying their rights and that marginalize them when it comes to access to the labor market and to social and political institutions. Secondly, the education of young people and adults was also called upon to raise the educational level of the adult population who did not have the same opportunities as the younger generation, by developing their professional competences and providing them with the academic credentials required for the competitive and selective labor market. Thirdly, the education of young people and adults is an environment in which the social problems and socio-cultural diversity that are rejected by common education find a welcome, opening up as a channel for reintroducing adolescents and young people to an educational system from which they were excluded at an early age and for accelerating the studies of those who have lagged far behind, academically. Finally, in the globalized culture of societies in which information and knowledge have a position of prominence and given the increase in life expectancy, the education of young people and adults has also to be responsible for providing opportunities for up-dating knowledge, obtaining qualifications and enjoying culture throughout life, regardless of the level of education achieved by individuals and communities.

The shape of the education of young people and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean was also influenced by the contribution that the popular education movement made to pedagogic thinking and to the recent political history of the region, which was marked by resistance to authoritarian regimes, a transition to democracy and national reconstruction after

armed conflicts, in which civil society's capacity for self-organization and mobilization played a prominent role. Although the profile and actions of social movements and organizations were substantially modified at the end of the 20th century, the popular education paradigm continues being the main point of reference of the practices for forming democratic citizenship and the defense of rights, particularly those practices promoted by civil society organizations.

At the transition to the new millennium, the regional context acquired characteristics that have created new learning needs and modified the shape of the education of young people and adults. Prominent among these are: the poor performance of the region's economy because of the subordinate position of the continent's countries in the globalized economy and culture; higher levels of unemployment, underemployment, informal and/or precarious work, which weaken trade union organizations and corroborate the persistence of social and economic inequalities and extreme levels of poverty⁴; the increase in internal and cross-frontier migration in search of better work opportunities, along with the displacement of people as a result of armed conflict; the generalization of democratization processes that have little impact in terms of distribution and that cause no substantial changes in the political culture. Added to these are the public recognition of the gender, generation, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of societies, driven by the respective identity movements in their denunciation of the predominantly male, European and monolingual government structures and social institutions; the deterioration in the environment, given which the awareness of social and environmental movements increases and their resistance intensifies; the emergence of new players and expressions of the climate of social conflict, well-known among which are the indigenous up-risings in Ecuador, Bolivia and Mexico, the Brazilian land-less people, Argentina pickets, Chilean high school students and other political and cultural movements by the continent's youth.

⁴ According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (*Cepal*), even with the slight progress that has been made in reducing poverty and unemployment, and the improvements in wealth distribution at the beginning of the millennium, in 2005 the region had 290 million people (55.3% of the total) living in conditions of poverty or destitution, with Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay suffering most acutely from this phenomenon.

In this new scenario, the fields of popular education and the education of young people and adults have tended to merge into an area in which an argument about educational projects linked to different rationalities has arisen. On the one hand, there are concepts, discourse, policies and practices based on the theory of human capital and that see education as providing economic benefits for individuals and societies, by giving priority to qualifying the labor force with the skills needed for working towards globalised capitalist development; on the other hand are those who are in favor of the values of justice and equality and who, besides endowing the popular layers of society with the competences and credentials required by the labor market in such a way as to protect them from unemployment and extreme poverty, provide the technical, human and political formation these people need for struggling for the transformations in society that will guarantee a dignified life in a sustainable environment and a democratic existence, where there is respect for diversity and human rights.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

The conventional parameters used for defining those destined to receive the education of young people and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean were constructed in such a way as to protect the compensatory viewpoint and restricted to recovering formal studies, which is why they take school education as the reference point and agree a minimum age limit⁵ that has a certain degree of lateness in instruction levels. In the light of these criteria and due to the magnitude of the phenomenon on the continent (Table 1), totally illiterate people, aged 15 and over, were considered the priority subjects for the education of young people and adults. An expansion in social demands for knowledge, in parallel with a broadening of the concept of literacy led, in turn, to the inclusion of young people and adults who have reduced levels of poor quality education among those destined for this program, and

⁵ In most of the countries in the region, in which compulsory education lasts for nine years, starting at six years old, the minimum age for participating in education programs for young people and adults at the basic level is 14, but there are older (15 in Venezuela and 16 in Puerto Rico) and younger (in Peru, the existence of a large number of adolescents who are way behind in their education justified the recent creation of a variation of the Alternative Basic Education Program, aimed at children and adolescents in the 12 to 18 age band) variations. In high school education the minimum age varies between 16 and 18.

who, because of the demographic transition and lack of success in the teaching system, are extremely numerous.

TABLE I
ILLITERACY AND INCOMPLETE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
IN THE POPULATION, AGED 15 AND OLDER

Country	Illiteracy in 2000 ^(*)		Incomplete elementary education 2000-2005 ^(**)	
	Illiterate people	%	%	Year
Uruguay	61,000	2	13.1 **	2005
Argentina	845,600	3	11.7 ***	2005
Cuba	292,800	3		
Costa Rica	120,600	4	25.3	2000
Chile	460,100	4	19	2003
Colombia	2,377,600	8		
Venezuela	1,186,900	7		
Panama	159,100	8		
Paraguay	223,300	7	35	2000
Ecuador	705,100	8	21.3	2001
Mexico	5,836,600	9	25.9	2004
Brazil	15,892,900	13	45	2002
Peru	1,719,600	10	25.8	2000
Bolivia	732,400	15	40.3	2002
Dominican Republic	911,500	16		
Honduras	944,600	25	45.2	2001
El Salvador	859,000	21	60.2	2003
Nicaragua	973,600	34	48.8	2001
Guatemala	2,016,900	31	61.2	2001
Haiti	2,506,700	50		
Region	39,073,300	11		

Sources: * Unesco: Institute for Statistics, cited by *Cepal*; ** Educational Tendencies in Latin America Information System (*Siteal*) (www.siteal.iipe_oei.org).

NB: *** Urban

Individuals for the education of young people and adults are best defined, however, by the category 'exclusion', because it comprises the set of social, economic and cultural processes that allow the unequal distribution of illiteracy and academic lateness in societies to be explained. That includes the variables gender, language and ethnicity and that also consider the social and spatial distribution of poverty in geographic regions, rural and urban zones and inner city areas. In Peru, for example, the average length of formal education of young people

and adults varies in accordance with the place they live (10 years study in urban areas and 6.6 years in rural areas) and the social and economic conditions of the individual (10 years study for those who are not poor, 8.4 years among the poor and 6 years among those who live in extreme poverty). In El Salvador, the urban population manages to study for 6.9 years, while in the rural area it does not exceed 3.7 years of school education. In Brazil, where the illiteracy rate varies between 22.4% in the Northeast to 6.2% in the South and where rural illiteracy reaches 26.2%, while the figure in urban areas is 8.7%, belonging to an ethnic and racial group is an important factor in educational inequality: the illiteracy rate among white people is 7.1%, rising to 16% among those who are of African descent. Similarly, the proportion of indigenous people in the population of Mexican states combines with social and economic inequality in such a way as to produce variations in the rates of illiteracy in entities of the federation that vary between levels close to 20% in Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, and rates of around 5% in Chihuahua and Jalisco. In Ecuador, the illiteracy rate among indigenous people is 28%, while the national average is 9%. In Colombia, where the average illiteracy rate is 7.9%, this figure rises to 13% among Afro-Colombians and 17.7% among indigenous groups.

Mapping out the participants of the education of young people and adults in the different countries in the region provides an outline of a relatively homogenous social individual who is a priority and one of those impoverished people who live in precarious urban settlements and survive on poorly qualified work in the informal economy. This generic characterization, however, includes a multitude of individuals, from whom countless singular identities emerge. The education of young people and adults is traditionally aimed at rural and urban migrants, with their ethnic, cultural and gender diversity. Recently, their numbers have been swelled by cross-frontier immigrants, who have increased because of the intensification of the international mobility of the labor force⁶, and the people who have been displaced by

⁶ There are significant numbers of Guatemalans in Mexico, Bolivians in Argentina, Haitians in the Dominican Republic and Dominicans in Puerto Rico. The migratory movement is intense also towards the United States, Canada and Europe, which has transformed international remittances into one of the most relevant sources of revenue for these countries. In 2005, the 9 to 12 million Mexicans who live legally or illegally in the United States (sources do not agree on the exact number) were responsible for remitting nearly US\$ 15 billion; more than 15% of the population of Ecuador has emigrated over the last few years and the remittances sent by them represent the second largest source of foreign earnings for the country, exceeded only by its sales of oil;

armed conflict or natural disaster⁷. But today the predominant group is that of the urban young from popular sectors who were not successful in regular schools and who, in the education of young people and adults, are looking for a place where their social and cultural characteristics will be accepted and which will allow them to reconcile study with work and accelerate the pace at which they receive an academic certificate and/or become involved in professional qualification processes⁸. If in the younger generations the gender chasm has closed due to the greater access, permanence and progression of young women in the education system, among adults and the elderly who are registered in literacy programs and the basic level of education for young people and adults, women who are looking to overcome the educational inequalities of the past, who are seeking to contribute to the education of their children, to improve their position in the world, to acquire knowledge and the skills required to participate in the community and to enjoy study as a place where they can socialize and have a relative degree of freedom, vis-à-vis their family and/or professional obligations, also stand out⁹. As the offer of education for young people and adults is mainly school-based and urban, rural populations and indigenous people, although representing a potentially numerous audience, are still being marginalized. At times, when poverty leads to an increase in criminality and swells the prison population, young prisoners, whose right to education is still valid when in prison, also gain in visibility.

Sociological literature about the education of young people and adults explains the secondary position of the modality in the public agenda because of the political weakness of those who have the potential to demand it. In the period under analysis, however, the emergence of native people on the regional political scene obliged educational policies to

remittances by emigrants is the pillar of the El Salvadorian economy. In 2006, the population of Puerto Rico living in the United States was 3.8 million, almost the same number as the 3.9 million who live on the Caribbean island that has the status of an Associated Free State of the USA.

⁷ It is estimated that 2.5 million people in Colombia have been displaced over the last 10 years because of the internal armed conflict.

⁸ In Nicaragua, for example, 60% of the students involved in the education of young people and adults are between 15 and 29. In Brazil, the proportion of young people between 18 and 24, registered in the education of young people and adults is 32% of the total. In the province of Buenos Aires, 38.5% of the students in young people and adult education at the basic level were under 17 in 2005.

⁹ Although gender differences in access to education have been reducing over the whole continent, especially among younger generations, being female aggravates the exclusion that results from other identity dimensions, such as coming from a rural area or belonging to indigenous groups or those of African descent.

recognize the ethnic, cultural and linguistic plurality of Latin American societies and consequently, the spread of a multilingual, intercultural education, which was claimed as being a strategy for preserving ethnic and cultural identities and which was institutionalized in the majority of countries in which the indigenous population is numerous, such as Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru.

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN THE DEFINITION OF THE AGENDA OF THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Since the setting up of Unesco after the war adult education, and literacy programs in particular, have been the fields for formulating policies and discourse that have been strongly influenced by international cooperation organisms. The five International Adult Education Conferences (*Confinte*a) held by Unesco in this period were arenas for discussing and legitimizing concepts and proposals, the impact of which on public education policies in countries has been more rhetorical than operative.

Over the last twenty five years policies for the education of young people and adults of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered from the influence of numerous international and regional initiatives that were either competitive or had very little in common¹⁰.

Although the proposal of education for life that was formulated in 1997 at the 5th UNESCO conference (*Confinte*a) hegemonically links the discourses that have molded recent young people and adult education policies in the region, the strategies for educational reform and policy that were implemented in this period have been influenced, above all, by the international initiative of Education for All¹¹ and more specifically, by its restricted version

¹⁰ Main Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (1981-2000); Education for All (1990-2015); Summit of the Americas (1994-2010); Millennium Objectives (2000-2015); Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (2002-2017); Ibero-American Summit (2002-2017); United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012); Ibero-American Plan for Literacy and the Education of Young People and Adults (2008-2015).

¹¹ Of the six priority targets pursued by the Education for All initiative coming out of the World Forum held in 2000 in Dakar, three of them refer to the education of young people and adults: target 3 implies satisfying the

that has reduced the generous ideas and original targets to policies focused on primary education for children, confining young people and adult education programs to a marginal position on the public agenda (Torres, 2001, 2003).

Two bilateral cooperation initiatives have had an impact on the current shape of the education of young people and adults in the region: the Adult Literacy and Basic Education programs (*Paeba*), developed in El Salvador (1993-1998), the Dominican Republic (1993), Honduras (1997-2000), Nicaragua (1997-2000), Paraguay (2000) and Peru (2003), with technical and financial support from the Spanish Cooperation Agency; and more recently the Cuban literacy program, using the television resources, *Yo Sí Puedo*, which has been adopted on a large scale in Venezuela and Bolivia, and also in pilot experiments, or on a smaller scale, in various other countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic).

More recently, the theme of adult literacy, which historically was a field for the discussion of political and pedagogic discourse and symbolic representations about the relationships between education and other areas of social life, has once more assumed a position of prominence on the agendas of international cooperation agencies. The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) helped proliferate international initiatives, the highlight being the Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (Life) 2005-2015, launched by Unesco's Basic Education Division, with the support of America's first lady, Laura Bush, which in its first stage covers just one country in the Caribbean¹². In the region, where it is estimated there are 39 million illiterate people and 110 million young people and adults who have low levels of poor quality education, the Ibero-American Plan for Adult Literacy, 2008-2015, coordinated by the Organization of Ibero-American States (*OEI*), is also in the final stages of preparation.

Although academics salute the fact that the initiatives of international organisms have put the theme of literacy back on the public agenda, they have reservations about them:

learning needs of all young people and adults, the objective of target 4 is to reduce illiteracy rates by 50% by 2015; and target 5 proposes achieving gender parity in access to education.

¹² Planned to include 35 countries over the three stages initiated in 2006, 2008 and 2010, Life is directed at countries that have more than 10 million illiterate people, where it is intended to reduce current illiteracy rates by half. The first group of countries selected included: Bangladesh, Egypt, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and the Yemen.

The good news regarding this renewed encouragement is, however, marred by the dispersion and even the overlapping of efforts on a national and regional scale; by the persistent sector mentality that tries to make inroads on the problem of illiteracy without concerning itself expressly with the economic and social policies that generate and reproduce it; by the persistent lack of articulation between literacy within the school environment and that outside schools; by the traditional lack of attention that is paid to illiteracy in rural areas, as well as to indigenous populations and languages; by the well-known quantitative emphasis on and pursuit of statistics and targets for eradicating it that (as we know from long experience) conspire against the quality and sustainability of the actions and learning and dismiss out of hand real access by the population to written culture¹³. (Torres, 2006)

The networks and organizations of civil society that are engaged in literacy and young people and adult education efforts are equally reticent with regard to these initiatives. In a study entitled *Correcting the errors*, educational activists criticize the scant investments in adult literacy and propose a set of directives to make policies and practices in this field effective (Archer, 2006).

These critical players recommend special attention be paid to gender equity and cultural and linguistic diversity in integral, contextualized and flexible literacy and basic education processes that tie reading, writing and arithmetical learning and development, which are understood as continuing processes of insertion in literate culture, to other dimensions of adult life in the community, such as economic subsistence, health and citizen participation.

CONTINUITY AND INTERRUPTIONS IN POLICIES FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

The recent public policies in the area of young people and adult education that have been developed in almost all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean fall in line with the other social policies developed by governments in the region within the context of

¹³ Published in the bulletin of the Latin American Group of Specialists in Literacy and Written Culture (*Gleace*), created in November 2006 under the auspices of *Crefal*, coordinated by Rosa Maria Torres (Ecuador) and comprising Lola Cendales (Colombia), Isabel Infante (Chile), Judith Kalman (Mexico) and Vera Masagão (Brazil).

macroeconomic adjustment and reform of the role of the neoliberal-oriented State and are subordinate to directives relating to restrictions on public spending, decentralization, focus and privatization.

In this situation, the educational reforms with which, since the mid-1990s, the region's countries have tried to face up to the new challenges of the globalized economy and culture, prioritize the elementary education of children and adolescents in terms of their attention and funds, which marginalizes the education of young people and adults in both teaching discourse and on the agenda of public policies, thus causing a loss of hierarchy and specificity. This option was influenced by the advice given by international cooperation organisms, led by the World Bank (which granted loans to countless basic education improvement policies), whose economic analyses of value for money separated the education of children and adults. This concept has already been exhaustively criticized by various authors, especially by Torres (1996).

After ten years the reforms obtained modest results when it came to the educational inclusion of children and adolescents who come from different social strata, but were unable to guarantee conditions of learning equity and equality, thereby producing great numbers of young people who were significantly behind in their education, which became the responsibility of the education of young people and adults to deal with.

The marginalization of the education of young people and adults in national policies contradicts the commitment assumed in 2000, in the Regional Action Milestone of the Education for All initiative, which explicitly states: "Countries are committed to incorporating the education of young people and adults in their educational systems and giving it priority in the educational reforms that are carried out, as part of the central responsibility of governments in the elementary education of their populations" (Unesco, 2007, p.32).

Regional research, however, found signs that the education of young people and adults became assimilated as a constituent part of the continent's educational systems: the formal recognition at the constitutional or sub-constitutional level of the right of young people and adults to literacy programs and basic education is an integral part of the legal organization of all countries. The legislation of countries recognizes the education of young people and adults one of the types of free basic education, the function of which is to promote literacy, guarantee progress in obligatory education, favor access to professional qualifications and to education for life, granting it special curricular and organizational flexibility, the use of means

and technologies and instituting assessment and certification strategies that allow for the validation of the knowledge acquired in non-formal learning processes. However, since the legislation imposes no obligations on employers, nor does it grant incentives to workers to pursue their studies, this limits real access to training opportunities. Furthermore, the secondary position of the education of young people and adults in public policies produces situations in which the right to education has been violated and the instruments available for demanding this right are incapable of rectifying the violation¹⁴.

Ten years after the 5th *Confintea*, the data collected in the regional study show a reduced evolution relative to the situation in the previous decade. Considering the dominant trend of the recent policies and practices developed by government departments the education of young people and adults is still governed by the compensatory paradigm, which is centered on school-based literacy programs and the recuperation of missed school years, which take place in precarious physical installations, using improvised human resources and scarce funding¹⁵, which barely scratches the surface of the issue given the extensive potential demand¹⁶ there is and the high rates of truancy and repeating of years. To these school-based modalities, although not always associated with them, a variety of short and/or accelerated occupational training courses is offered, the provision of which is the responsibility of

¹⁴ Information from Brazil and Puerto Rico indicates that the courts have been the place for the struggle to guarantee the right to education for young people and adults. Among the experiences reported by Puerto Rico, are mentioned the legal victories for the inclusion of people with special needs, the guarantee of educational rights for prisoners and the case of a civil defense organization for the educational rights of immigrants in New York, which was successful in its legal plea for allowing access to universities for minority groups.

¹⁵ Not all national information was able to indicate the amount of public spending on young people and adult education. Those that had data were divided into two groups: one which attributes less than 1% of its educational spending (México, Puerto Rico and Peru) and a second group where public investment in the education of young people and adults is between 2.5% and 3.6% of its total spending on education (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela).

¹⁶ For an estimated demand of around 5 million people with low levels of education the cover provided by the education of young people and adults in Chile reaches just 165,000 students, i.e., 4.7% of the potential demand. In Brazil, where the young and adult population that has not finished elementary education is close to 65 million people, the supply of basic education of this type, in 2005, was 5.6 million places, 8.6% of the potential demand. In Peru, enrollment in the education of young people and adults in 2002 was a little over 141,000 students, which represented 1.9% of the potential demand, estimated at 7.3 million people.

different government agencies, business agencies, or social or philanthropic organizations. The government structures responsible for coordinating these policies are, for the most part, precarious, politically weak in terms of influence and vulnerable to a lack of political and administrative continuity. Their inability to produce synergy and negotiate inter-sector policies for generating income and reducing poverty, for promoting health and the preservation of the environment, among other things, frequently results in a wasting of resources and the overlapping of initiatives.

When so configured, public policies for the education of young people and adults lead to poor results, both in the educational sphere as well as on the social and economic plane, as the learning and the credentials they provide do not result in effective social inclusion or significant social and occupational mobility, nor do they have an impact on the political or cultural scenario of countries.

Various national studies report that during educational reform the organisms responsible for the national coordination of policies for the education of young people and adults slipped down the ranking in the hierarchy of ministries, which resulted in disjointed actions and a dilution of the specificity of the modality in management practices. Such was the case in Argentina, whose National Department for Adult Education (*Dinea*), which was set up in 1968, was dissolved in 1992, when the federal government's education services were transferred to the provinces. In Colombia also, the *Dinea* that was set up in 1988 simply disappeared from the Ministry of Education's organization chart in 1994. In Peru, the educational reform of the 1990s drained resources from the informal education system that had been built up in the 1970s, a time when the education of young people and adults was seen as a tool for social, economic and community development and when it acquired a participative inter-sector configuration.

Cuba, Chile and Mexico are exceptional cases, where the education of young people and adults has acquired a certain institutionalism, with management structures that have had a relative prestige, autonomy and resources. Mexico has built the longest-lasting government institution dedicated to the education of young people and adults in the region: the National Adult Education Institute (*Inea*). Set up in 1981, as a spin-off from the National Literacy Program, *Inea* is a decentralized body of the federal administration with its own legal identity and assets, and with normative, technical and coordination functions. It manages almost 1% of the budget of the Department of Public Education (*SEP*) and intervenes directly at the

national, state and local levels. At the end of the 1990s, within the context of educational reform and with the aim of expanding the participation of sub-national spheres of government in the funding of programs for the education of young people and adults the institute started being decentralized. Between 1998 and 2005 agreements were signed with 27 of the 32 federated Mexican states, but *Inea* still retains its normative, technical and coordination functions. In Chile, the different modalities for offering education to young people and adults are fully a part of the official national education departments, although they do not have a position of prominence in the educational policy agenda. The assimilation of the education of young people and adults by the Chilean educational policy was due to the fact that it fulfils not only the function of guaranteeing the right to education by a leveling of studies, but its proposal is to intervene in the dynamic of access to work and income, by working also with professional qualifications.

In addition to affecting its institutionalism the new models of government management that emerged from the reform of the State in Latin America had repercussions on the policies for the education of young people and adults in two interlinked issues: the decentralization of the provision of educational services to provincial and local governments, and the establishment of partnerships between government bodies and civil society organizations for providing educational services.

There is a certain consensus of opinion that the main motivation behind the decentralization of the services for the education of young people and adults was the transfer of financial responsibility to provincial and local governments, which represented a reallocation of job positions rather than an actual decentralization of management mandates, since in most countries the norms, curricular reference points and the design of the main programs remained centralized. National studies do not fully agree with regard to the evaluation of this process. In Chile, Ecuador and Brazil the deconcentration of responsibilities to local governments was evaluated positively. Operating with the hypothesis that the local authority is more susceptible to the social control of public policies and to educational change Brazilian information says that progressive local governments, influenced by the paradigm of popular education, introduced policy and teaching innovations in the education of young people and adults that gave it greater flexibility and pertinence. In the case of Argentina, on the other hand, where the counterpart to decentralization was a weakening of national

coordination, it is reckoned that the education of young people and adults became heterogeneous, disperse and fragmentary.

Following the new fashion for state regulation, the public funding model and the hiring of literacy services (the professional qualification and education of adults by civil associations, philanthropic institutions and non-governmental organizations, and the like) spread throughout the whole region. In Nicaragua, the government established a permanent agreement with 76 civil organizations for carrying out educational programs. The evaluation report from Colombia, a country in which the policy of decentralization met strong resistance from the teacher movement, states that the competitive service tender mechanisms, per capita subsidies and assessment by quantitative results push teaching criteria aside in favor of economic efficacy, continue to professionally devalue the teachers of adults and bring the logic of the private market into the public sphere that guarantees the right to education in adult life. It also indicates that, while the discourse in favor of the transfer of the responsibility of government institutions to civil society claims that the programs are more pertinent to the communities for which they are destined, it finds no evidence that individuals have a greater participation in curricular definitions or in managing the services provided.

Over recent years the admission that the educational reforms for promoting quality education for all¹⁷ have partially failed has unleashed a critical review of the, until now predominant, neoliberal orientation and this has led to a partial revision of the priority given to the education of young people and adults. In Argentina, getting over the crisis of 2001 meant a partial recovery of the leadership position of national and provincial governments in the coordination of educational policies, including a progressive increase in public funding. As from 2003, the Brazilian government adopted a new line in favor of the literacy of young people and adults, for which it earmarked greater federal investment. In Uruguay, where the State never failed to comply with its functions in guaranteeing the right to education, the

¹⁷ The 2005 Global Monitoring Report of Education for All considers Latin America as being the region that has the largest number of countries where steps towards quality education are lagging behind relative to the advances obtained in its other goals. Neither is the progress obtained in access to education significant; the net rate of elementary education evolved by just 2 percentage points (from 93% to 95%) between 1999 and 2004. In outlining the Regional Panorama and noting the high year-repeat rates, low education conclusion indices and the limited competences acquired in elementary education, the 2007 Report states: “The development of education is sometime produced in detriment to the quality of the teaching” (p. 8).

debate about the priority attributed to the education of young people and adults and the role that non-governmental organizations occupy in providing it is recent and inconclusive. In Peru, the recognition in 2003 of a situation of “educational emergency” led to a review of the educational policy targets that opened up room for the constitution of a new modality known as basic alternative education, which has a flexible and innovative curriculum.

There are countries in the region, however, in which the State has preserved or recovered the role of protagonist in the formulation, implementation and coordination of public policies for the education of young people and adults, such as is the case in Cuba and Venezuela. Over the last six years the Venezuelan State has transferred part of its tax revenue from oil to the educational sector and assumed a prominent role in educational policies, in general, and in policies for the education of young people and adults in particular, for which it uses not only the traditional management organs, but has added new parastate structures called “missions”¹⁸, governed by unconventional bodies like the Army and the state oil and electricity companies. It has to be recognized that the Venezuelan policy, although based on a precarious and circumstantial institutional arrangement and even though it does not have a reliable monitoring and assessment system that allows for the results claimed by the government to be checked (like the elimination of illiteracy), it has been able to mobilize resources and motivate young people and adults to reenter the education system.

Distant neighbors: Cuba and Haiti

Two small island countries located in the Caribbean, Cuba and Haiti, are exceptions to the dominant trends in the shaping of policies for the education of young people and adults in the region and represent its two extreme cases. While Cuba has practically extinguished illiteracy and guaranteed that its population over 15 has an average of 9.5 years of education, Haiti, in which more than half the population lives in a situation of extreme poverty, has a rate

¹⁸ The Robinson I and II Missions correspond to a literacy program, using the Cuban *Yo Sí Puedo* method, and elementary education, respectively; the Ribas Mission is aimed at training at the high school level; and the Sucre Mission, at the university level. All of them are linked to health and food missions, as well as the Vuelvan Caras Mission, which includes skills training for work and financial help for cooperatives that bring together people living in situations of poverty.

of juvenile and adult illiteracy of around 49%, and the budget for its literacy programs barely covers the salaries of the employees responsible for the government administration of the sector.

The persistent and successful Cuban policy of education for young people and adults is driven by the central government, but understood as an element of a society that educates its people. It started 45 years ago with an extensive literacy campaign, followed by successive drives to raise the educational level of the population until all had concluded 9 years of basic education. Today, this program has more than 8000 trained teachers and 3% of public spending on education is invested in a varied range of general and professional training programs, language learning and university education. Among the recent programs those that stand out are the offer of flexible and subsidized high school education for young people between 17 and 29 who have not concluded their studies and are out of work; a professional training program, aimed at the “conversion” of 100,000 workers who are unemployed because of the decline in the sugar cane industry and a university chair for the elderly.

Molded by a history of political instability, violence and deep inequality in the distribution of wealth the State in Haiti has been incapable of guaranteeing the right to education as provided for in its Constitution, which means that the private sector today controls 80% of school services (almost always given in French), to which only a number of the elite or urban middle class have access. The absence of a public education system that is accessible to the general population living in the countryside and towns, whose mother tongue is *créole* which has been recognized as a school education language since 1980, annuls the efforts over the last century of ten successive young people and adult literacy campaigns.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Due to the social and economic conditions of the majority of those for whom the education of young people and adults is destined it does not form an attractive market for the private for-profit sector, whose participation in enrolment is reduced and fairly concentrated

in the sectors of high school and technical and professional education¹⁹. The weight of the provision of education falls therefore to public authorities and not-for-profit institutions.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, civil society organizations have a history of engagement in the field of the education of young people and adults which has allowed them to build national, regional and sub-regional networks like *Ceaal*. Its contribution to the field includes the insertion and empowerment of communities, the struggle for the defense of educational rights for young people and adults, theoretical and methodological help resulting from the systemization of popular education practices, accumulated knowledge in specific themes, human rights, gender relations, environmental preservation, popular economy, etc. and for other individual groups: women, indigenous people, young people, prisoners, etc. The types of social organization that intervene in this field are complex, comprising everything from local community organizations to assistance and social promotion foundations that are very largely institutionalized, like those supported by churches,²⁰ alongside non-governmental organizations for supporting social movements and/or human rights.

Regional research has reported different types of relationship between social and government organizations when it comes to the development of policies for the education of young people and adults. The first type, which is found in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru and Nicaragua consist in multisector articulations for the defense of rights, the exercise of political debate, control and incidence in policies for the education of young people and adults, which assume a variety of forms, such as forums or consortiums that are autonomous relative to government, but also round tables for dialogue and negotiation between society, government and the institutionalized councils of democratic management. There are also social movements that organize their own processes for preparing young people and adults and demand their own government policies, as is the case with Brazil's Movement of Landless Rural Workers or the Picket Movement in Argentina.

¹⁹ In Peru, Colombia and some other countries accelerated certification, whose potential public consists of young people who have lagged behind in their education, attracted private for-profit initiative to the education of young people and adults.

²⁰ An institutionalized network linked to the Roman Catholic Church, which is involved in the field young people and adult education and mentioned in information from the Andean Region (Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), is the Movement for Full Popular Education and Social Promotion, Faith and Happiness (<http://www.feyalegria.org>).

Another type of link between the State and civil society organizations, the service provision agreements for the education of young people and adults, is more widely publicized than the above variations. This type of shared action became generalized the moment the reformed State started favoring the functions of regulation in detriment to the provision of educational services, and delegated them to decentralized government bodies or transferred them to civil society, or even to the private sector. There are cases in which the partnerships result from revindication, dialogue and negotiation processes and are interpreted as progress towards the democratization of public policies and of the machinery of government. But there are also countries, as is the case with Chile, in which the reform of the State established such a neoliberal model that the partnerships simply became the hiring of third party services, in which social organizations are only involved to the extent that they carry out the educational activities, but have no intervention in the conception or management of such activities.

THE CRITICAL STUMBLING BLOCK IN THE FORMATION OF EDUCATORS

The regional study unveils the fact that one of the great weaknesses of the education of young people and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean is the lack of systems for the initial training and perfecting of educators.

The subordination of a large part of the practices of the education of young people and adults, especially literacy training, to the principle of social solidarity means that the role of adult educator is carried out by a variety of different profiles, which includes everything from university-qualified professionals to community agents and voluntary facilitators who have varying levels of education, the majority of whom have no specialist training. Only in Cuba and Uruguay the teachers of adults must be necessarily professionals. Recourse to improvised educators, in turn, determines that the activity has scant social recognition, which thus legitimizes precarious working conditions and remuneration.

The marginal position of the education of young people and adults in educational policies and systems makes it even more difficult to form a specific professional field of work and in this context there is little demand or incentive for the initial training of educators for this type of education. For this reason, university-level teacher training and specialization courses for teachers in the area of young people and adult education are few, a situation that is confirmed by the reduced involvement of universities with this area. In this aspect, too, Cuba

is a rare exception, thanks to its extensive educational network of decentralized university-level teacher training. Most of the national information simply states that there are no systematic processes for the training of these educators. In public teaching networks, the same teachers work with children, adolescents, young people and adults, frequently using unsuitable methodologies, curriculums and teaching materials.

The lack of trained educators to act in the area means that teachers are trained in service. Due to the scant presence of the subject in universities many of the training initiatives are carried out by non-governmental organizations, whose accumulated experience in popular education gives them the sensitivity to recognize the qualities of the facilitators coming from this area, such as their solidarity and ethical and political commitment to communities. Some of the most significant experiences of popular education centers working in the field of training the educators of adults, however, are not publicized because there is a lack of systematization.

ELOQUENT SILENCE

Among the issues highlighted by the regional investigation as being a transversal axis, the one about which there is a dearth of national information, refers to the contribution of young people and adult education to sustainable development and preservation of the environment, a theme which is gaining greater space on the public agenda, everyday. The relative silence on the theme is even more surprising if we consider that the policies and practices of formal and informal environmental education are numerous in the region's countries, although they are not recognized as practices in the education of young people and adults. Some of the information from countries makes mention of the social and environmental theme in basic education curriculums and practices for young people and adults and among the experiences of civil society that have been reported, there are significant cases of learning related to local sustainable development; other reports detail the policies, institutions and national environmental networks that, except with rare exceptions, are separate from the programs for the education of young people and adults with which they have organic links. Our hypothesis with regard to this is that the education of young people and adults has no symbolic leadership in the current situation to articulate the policies and

practices of environmental education, in the same way that it cannot do it either with topics related to health or digital inclusion education.

Regional research also reveals that the policies for the education of young people and adults do not include an assessment culture: assessment studies are rare, so that the impact of programs and projects can only be inferred from indicators such as enrollment. Knowledge about the education of young people and adults in the region is also limited because of the subject's reduced presence in universities and the scant research that is carried out into its multiple dimensions.

PROMISES OF A MORE RELEVANT EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Having considered the major national programs there were few positive responses to the summons of the regional continuity documents to the commitments undertaken in Hamburg in favor of inter-sector policies for the education of young people and adults that strengthen democratic citizenship, prioritize links with economic development and transformation in the world of work, extend to include poverty reproduction processes and favor environmental conservation. In most of the countries the degree of articulation between programs directed at literacy and raising educational levels, at qualifications for work and training for the popular economy (which among other types includes cooperativism, associativism and self-employment), and as already mentioned, at environmental and health education and access to new information technology, is low.

The most significant intentions of the inter-sector articulation of policies for the education of young people and adults are of two types. The first type emphasizes social promotion and includes programs aimed at people living in a situation of poverty and social risk in which adherence to literacy programs, the raising of education levels or skills training for work are the counterparts to the transfer of minimum income. Examples of this are the Vuelvan Caras Mission, of Venezuela, the *Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados* [Unemployed Household Heads] Plan, in Argentina, and Cuba's '*Plan de Superación Integral para Jóvenes que no Trabajan ni Estudian* [Total Accomplishment Plan for Young People who neither Study nor Work]. A second type brings together programs that, in aiming to satisfy the multiple learning needs of young people and adults, favor access to an enriched and flexible

curriculum, which in one complete social and educational program, draws together skills training for work and other relevant content, values and skills: health, gender relationships, intercultural studies, access to new technology, etc., such as the *Modelo de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo (MEVyT)* [Education for Life and Work Model] developed in Mexico and the Chilean *Chilecalifica* Program.

Other signs of hope for a more pertinent education for young people and adults are to be found in the national studies that, meeting the needs of the common investigation protocol, report a multiplicity of promising experiences in different research fields that are being carried out by civil society organizations, local governments or universities. Systematically setting out the lessons learned from these policies and practices, however, is a task to be accomplished in another article.

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