

## **“SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: TRANSFERS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION”**

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### **“APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH: LIMITS AND SCOPE”**

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#### **1) INTRODUCTION**

I would like to begin with a question which I think is central and supports a pragmatic view of the relationship between science and society, the relationship between the two and the mechanisms of integration that may arise from this encounter. Let's look at it this way: if an engineer builds bridges and an architect designs houses, a dentist fixes teeth and a doctor makes sure our bodies are working properly, then what the hell does a sociologist do?

On the basis of this simple but important question, we can try to identify some of the many activities sociologists engage in many different ways, that are linked to the work they do for society from the perspective of research, whether in sociology, anthropology, or the social sciences in general.

In my particular case, it has proved crucial to find the mechanisms and strategies for ensuring that the knowledge acquired and generated by research can be directly used and applied to the solution of specific problems, since it is there that sociology finds the instrument that enables it to modify some of the actual problems affecting society. This is important, particularly in the so-called Third World countries, where the development of society has been slow and complicated and where the levels of well-being usually reveal a sharp difference between the rich (a few with a great deal) and the poor (many with very little). If we add to this the slow development of democracies and the existence of a bourgeoisie with very little commitment to a sustainable form of development that will have an impact on the various levels of society, we realize there is fertile ground for the practical exercise of social research in the search for a better balance, that would facilitate the search for spaces for convergence-in the broad sense, where the main social demands of groups with the greatest problems and needs will be listened to and met.

In other words, without ignoring the importance of the theoretical and methodological development of various paradigms of knowledge, I think that sociology, as a practical science, can and must have immediate, direct, visible and measurable results on communities with problems that suffer from specific problems, such as poverty, marginalization, ignorance, exclusion, rejection, lack of organization, etc, because it is precisely this, through the analysis of these and many other similar issues, that produces the information, though empirical testimonies, that validates much of the professional work of the social sciences.

I have often felt a twinge of embarrassment, when I suddenly arrive in a community and introduce myself into its members' lives to see their poverty at first hand, to observe their destitution, photograph and describe it and then use this to write essays, articles or books or develop theories that will allow me to quantify, measure, qualify and label the various groups and social strata, by drawing up complex typologies to identify a particular social class, segment or movement. For example, the walls of the Institute for Social Sciences in Mexico are hung with enormous photographs that "adorn" the institute's corridors and staircases. They are photos that date from the 1940s that were taken by pioneering Mexican sociologists during their long trips through rural and indigenous zones. They are anthropomorphic photos showing the front views and profiles of various ethnic groups and tribes, which reflects the type of research carried out at the time, which focussed largely on discovering indigenous features and the traditions of the tribes they belonged to. Yet looking at them today, from a contemporary point of view, they look for all the world like "mug shots". This is hardly surprising: that was the view people had of social science and society at that that time. But today, at a distance, with all the dizzying technological and scientific development the world has seen over the past fifty years, these faces seem to be asking, what else could you do for us, apart from taking photographs of us?

I really feel that, from the logic of social sciences, we should rethink the objectives we have when we arrive in communities to introduce ourselves into their lives and houses, to eat their food, talk to their children, learn their languages and puzzle out their customs before returning to the ivory towers of our cubicles to construct vast, analytical theses in impressive academic language. Many of us normally come back to write various reports, which are usually only read and hopefully understood by our local colleagues or those in other countries. Once he has accomplished his mission, the social scientist will attend dozens of congresses, seminars, workshops, round tables and academic events, will obtain scholarships and official subsidies or fellowships from foundations to enable him to go on creating a long, increasingly specialized curriculum that will enable him to achieve a solid position in what is now understood as the scientific world of intellectual production.

That is why, when discussing transfers and the social integration between science and society, I feel it is useful to ask what we can do to bring academia down from its lofty heights to the communities it studies. What can we do to try to develop and implement a reasonably intelligent proposal to improve community

life? In my particular case, I have focussed my research on three central urban problems: Garbage, Food Supplies and Youth, issues that are apparently unrelated but which have enabled me to explore the different scenarios of everyday life in the city and which, in addition to the characteristics of the social actors involved in these issues, are an ideal field, not only for studying them but also for promoting cooperatives for workers, peasants, scavengers, and neighborhood assemblies or else for recovering popular culture and strengthening citizenship. Working with these groups has required having a very clear idea of the need to promote the identities of these groups from the outset, so that, having achieved a new sense of their self-worth and dignity, they will be able to begin to confront the stigmatization they often suffer at the hands of government, politicians and the media. Working with them has been important, partly because of the commitment born of research, although over time, it has evolved into a particular way of understanding life, of trying to find possible, concrete solutions that will permit the social advance of these groups.

The case of the study of impoverished youth in the city (1987-1997) proved particularly significant, since it enabled me, for the first time ever, to combine the lessons I had learnt-both positive and negative from the both the world of garbage and food supplies- since the nature of this particular issue required the use of applied research, which enabled me to embark on a reflection with a larger scope, oriented towards the creation of a sort of “model” which, over the years, has advanced towards the construction of a conceptual proposal, which aims to be generalized and repeated in other problems, with other urban communities. The first result of this experience was the design and implementation of a project known as the “Model for Social Development for Mexico City” which, as a research team, we were able to apply directly from 1997 to 2000, during the so-called “first democratic government of the city” in a borough (Alvaro Obregón) with a population of nearly a million inhabitants.

At this point, some sort of explanation is required, since working in a city like Mexico necessarily involves assimilating and accepting the reformulation of what is meant by the concept of what must-and could-be understood as “urban issues” in view of the enormous dimensions and characteristics that interact, complicate, generate and eventually define the life forms and strategies of what makes a megalopolis “livable” or at least bearable. Mexico City is home to approximately 18 million inhabitants, scattered throughout a geographical area of approximately 3,500 square kilometers, if one includes the municipalities in the neighboring states comprising the Mexico City Metropolitan Zone (MCMZ), just over half of which correspond to the urbanized area. This characteristic alone makes Mexico City a much larger “village” than many countries, as well as an immense social laboratory with an intense, contrasting life.

The capital of Mexico includes the shocking opulence of certain sectors, with enormous resources and assets, and impoverished slums without water or services set in caves and cardboard houses. It is a city with overwhelming levels of public and private corruption at every level of society, where inadequate urban

planning has led to the permanent expansion of countless “belts of misery” both inside the city and in the Metropolitan Zone (MZ) of the city which, in addition to its natural growth, continues to receive recently-arrived migrants from rural zones.

Mexico City could be seen as a single unit: However, both politically and geographically speaking, this “unit” is divided into two sections: the Federal District (consisting of 16 boroughs) and the MZ, which corresponds, in practical terms, to a conurbation of 17 municipalities in the State of Mexico, each of which houses approximately half of the city’s population (about 9 million people).

The urban sprawl spread to this conurbation from the Federal District. In other words, there was a major shift from the center to the periphery, constituting what is now known as the MCMZ, particularly during the period from 1960 to 1980, when the number of inhabitants rose from 5.4 million to 13 million respectively.<sup>1</sup> The definition of the limits of the MCMZ is a point that has modified over the years; on the one hand there are the 16 boroughs comprising the Federal District and on the other, there are the neighboring populations, whose number has risen from 16 to 27 and then to 34 to their present total of 58 municipalities within this conurbation which, at least in theory, are monitored by the Program for the Regulation of the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico (VMMZ).

The MCMZ has become the highest concentration of population in the country. In 1990, it was inhabited by 17 million people (a figure that included 27 municipalities in the state of Mexico) corresponding to 20% of the total number of inhabitants at the national level, a figure that has remained virtually unchanged over the past decade. Due to the high concentration of this metropolitan area, it has certain inherent characteristics, such as the growth of the urban versus the rural population, the physical expansion of cities and internal migration. These have led to other features, such as the high demand for land and housing, which exceeds the capacity for response of the public and private sector together; the over-saturation of infrastructure in public services and roads; irregular land use; the population of unsuitable areas, which in turn leads to environmental degradation and an accumulated deficit in the supply of urban facilities, which, as a whole, create social pressure and very different levels of social and political marginalization among its inhabitants.

Yet despite the existing political and geographical divisions of the city, its parts are interconnected. There are no borders as far as everyday life is concerned, although there are definite contrasts. Despite its numerous slums and “lost cities”, the Federal District is better equipped and has more infrastructure than any other city in the country. It is here that the country’s economic and political power, trade, industry and employment is concentrated. As some intellectuals have remarked, “the country lives through the city”. At the other end of the spectrum, the MZ is extremely unequal, with some fully urbanized, modern, almost American

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<sup>1</sup> Zona Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México. CONAPO, Mexico. 1995.

areas and others that are irregular settlements, overpopulated proletarian cities with a lack of public services, unpaved roads, whole blocks without safe drinking water, crime, overcrowding, malnutrition, half-naked children who wander through the dusty streets of a dried-out lake that is now a desert, amid a tangled mass of power lines trying to steal electricity from the city. This, unfortunately, now constitutes an important part of Mexico City.

There, where the contradictions of modernity and marginalization are painfully evident, social problems become insoluble issues that are so commonplace that they have become part of a somber, depressing landscape.

The following sections of this paper describe two experiences of applied research work. One analyzes the case of the youth “gangs”<sup>2</sup> in the popular sectors of Mexico City, nicknamed “Gang lads” by the media, which was the result of a direct request by the City government to the UNAM Institute for Social Research to help reduce the climate of physical violence that had developed mainly in the poorest neighborhoods in the late 1980s between these groups. The other is the result of three years of work in Public Administration to design a Model for Social Development that was implemented, as a pilot program, in the Álvaro Obregón neighborhood from 1997 to 2000. Finally, the conclusions provide a brief analysis of some of the characteristics common to both experiences, which could serve in future multidisciplinary projects to promote the various transfers that encourage social integration and which, in the last analysis, enable one to understand a major part of the relationship between science and society from the point of view of social research.

## **2.) YOUTH, CULTURE AND SOCIAL POLICY**

In Mexico there are approximately 25 million youths aged 12 to 24. This represents just over a quarter of the country’s population. Yet, in spite of the numerical size, the policy or rather “the policies”, both public and private that have been implemented for their attention so far, have been short-lived and risky and have not been integrated into a long range national project.

How can social research help to improve a situation of this kind? The text that follows briefly describes a recent experience (1987-2004) implemented in the underprivileged young environment in Mexico City and the metropolitan area.

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<sup>2</sup> 3. The term “bandas” or gangs refers to young people from popular sectors who, during the 1980s and part of the 1990s called themselves this as a means of establishing their own identity. However, the phenomenon assumed various guises over the years and a discussion on the current situation of these groups is included at the end of this paper.

## 2.1 Youth, The future's shadow.

No one can deny the demographical reality of Mexico's youth. Moreover, no one can minimize its growing presence in society and its inevitable role in the country's modernization and social change. "Mexico is a "country of young people" says one of favorite cliché of the politicians (regardless of the party to which they belong) when they want to talk about the "promising future" that lies in the hands of the new generations. But what will the future really hold for them?

Asking this question is important since when we say "the youth" or "the young" (as a social group), we usually make the mistake of including different realities and sometimes completely contradictory ones in the same concept. Here as in many other cases, "the whole (the youth) is not the same as the addition of all its parts" and if there is a principle that governs the image of youth, it is the "principle of uncertainty" whereby the observer always affects what is being observed.

In other words, youth in our society is divided into groups with a wide variety of development possibilities as well as very different educational, employment, cultural and entertainment opportunities that can sometimes be diametrically opposed. Schools, fads, customs, neighborhoods, tastes, symbols, and, of course, purchasing power, separate them from the whole and sorts them into smaller groups with common affinities.

Young people in Mexico are born and grow into very different environments, with their possibilities of success or failure established virtually at birth. The young are marked, so to speak, by their race, origin and social condition so that without making much effort, one can easily tell what their future will be.

Nowadays, Mexican society is more unequal than before, more heterogeneous than before with a greater concentration of wealth and a more excluded population. In cities as well as in the countryside we can see different worlds everywhere, separated by social situations as different as those that separate Geneva from Calcutta. Today, misery is far more extreme in the cities, near the financial centers: there are homeless people, street children, beggars, windshield cleaners, clowns, street vendors, scavengers, men and children and youngsters who are not really "another society" coexisting in the same country, but like a distorted image of the same coin, the true face of our modernization.

What can the future hold for the young in the underprivileged sectors in this situation?

For its part, the government policy dedicated to "youth care" (which originated in Cardenas' presidency in 1939) can be divided into four basic guidelines: 1) to keep the young busy, creatively entertained (through training, promotion and the use of free time); 2) to ensure social control of the young, by

mobilizing them (through the inclusion of leaders, leftist groups, guerrillas, gangs, and anybody who could pose a real or potential threat); 3) political preparation (through inclusion into the official party and the political leadership of the different fronts and social movements); 4) the institutionalization of economical support (through programs to fight poverty, incorporation into the work force, crime prevention, war against drug abuse, open school, etc.).

## **2.2 A project in four phases.**

It is not the main objective of this document to present a detailed reflection on the intermittent social policy for the youth in Mexico. However, by way of an example, the last great institutional project for the young that was active for eleven years (between 1977 and 1988) was known as CREA –which literally means “Believe”, in Spanish- (the Spanish acronym for the National Resource Council for Youth Care), ended up being called NO-CREA –“don’t believe” by the young since over time it evolved into a breeding ground for the junior leagues of the official party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

It is precisely within this framework that our research work begins, in 1987, with a basic objective: to evaluate the status of youth in the underprivileged classes known as the “gang kids”, with their living conditions, their violent relationship with the police and their negative image in the eyes of society. One year after initiating this experience, it was suggested that we continue with a broader project based on the research applied to the young, a project still underway consisting of four work periods: 1) the social diagnosis (1987-1988); 2) underprivileged youth, its means and its effects(1989-1992); 3) professional work with the young (1992-1996), 4) experiences with elected governments in the Federal District (1997-2001).

From the outset, an underlying objective of this project has been to support youth in the underprivileged areas in Mexico City in order to open up new areas of participation and integration of this important sector with the rest of society, in other words, to review their structural conditions for development and to submit a proposal based on their own experience for a policy on youth care which can really convert this youth into a strategic participant in urban development.

## **2.3 The social diagnosis (1987-1988).**

In 1987, Mexico City was routinely “bombarded” by the mass media on the same subject; juvenile violence and gangs. Drug addicts, assassins, burglars, rapists, alcoholics, perverts, vagrants and gangs, these were some of the names that the press, the radio, and television gave a large sector of our society, the young in the underprivileged zones, better known as the “gang kids” (chavos banda).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “chavo”, “kid” a synonym for young person, “banda” refers to a gang.

The city authorities did not have a clear policy for dealing with this problem and the official response was confined to “police operations” in the areas with the most conflicts, creating a vicious circle: problems-repression-more problems-more repression.

As a result of a request by the chief counselor to the mayor, a diagnosis was requested from the UNAM (Mexico’s National Autonomous University) Social Studies Institute, to measure the social effect of what was going on.

We began the first phase of our research precisely at this time and our objectives were very clear: first, to measure the actual number of gangs and their structural characteristics and to determine the “most violent areas”; second, to find out what was going on in the police and the administrative environment in order to try to put a stop to the brutal repression carried out by the police against these young people.

Repression in the underprivileged and marginal areas of the city is more or less a permanent situation that is increased or reduced depending on pressure by the different social groups (parents, merchants, business people, neighbors) or accusations made by the public, by the media or because of a strictly police decision.

Operations known as “razzias” or “dispan” (gang dissipation) occur, usually on Friday and Saturday nights; their objective being to “arrest a few in order to scare the masses of youngsters”, according to the police officers, even though these arrests are characterized by brutality and corruption.

A survey of the city’s 16 police chiefs gave us our first clue. The police and local authorities really thought that the kids were all delinquents and drug-addicts and thus had to be repressed. The situation was tense in the city and the violence exercised by the repression produced yet more violence. There are many testimonies with detailed accounts of the kids’ feelings, the arrests, the police abuses, the corruption to “buy freedom”, even the deaths of some of them in these clashes.

In general terms, the local authorities kept in contact with some “juvenile leaders” that had been detected through the Juvenile Popular Councils (CPJ), but direct public action to deal with the phenomenon of violence (police and juvenile) was minimal.

The problem had been defined and the participants were also identified, but there was an additional problem: How could we get approach the kids?, How could we enter the underprivileged juvenile world of gangs without scaring them?, How could we gain their trust in order to discover their environment and their own universes? We did this little by little and by using recreation, music and the gang’s free time as objectives, which enabled us to get close to the different juvenile



groups in the different areas around the city. In the systematic contact with the kids and the systematic field work, through our attendance and organization of rock concerts, we began the first phase of the “social diagnosis of Mexico City youth”.

Some of the data found in this diagnosis is simple. Within the social and territorial universe of the underprivileged classes, youth acquires new ways of life and new expressions at different levels. Schools, which once offered upward social mobility, now have a limited capacity to achieve this objective. The work world, in its own way, no longer offers a broad spectrum of options for employment. On the contrary, it presents great barriers for a youngster with little or no manual or job qualifications to fight for a place in the workforce that has shrunk due to the crisis. For its part, culture, traditional values and behavior in society, are no longer their own. They do not incorporate them as previous generations did. Families seem to falter in the face of the impossibility of offering its young members a strong socializing space, bonding, capable of orientating them, as it traditionally did through one of the most difficult phases of human life: youth.

In Mexico, a significant number of underprivileged youths have been building a “way of life” and ways of social and economical survival with very distinct characteristics. Their way of dressing, language, their preference for original non-commercial music, their rejection of authority, their decadent image and their attempts to organize themselves in more global organizations, are phenomena that are eventually recorded by the city’s mass media.

In the face of this, the middle classes of what can be called the “integrated society” express uncertainty and tend to compare the existence of this part of the underprivileged youth with an exaggerated version of the much-feared “gangs” of previous decades. The presence of these youngsters is seen as a threat to the middle sectors of society. The situation is reduced to asking for more public and private protection in order to guarantee the control and penalization of the crimes the gangs commit (or supposedly commit). But the causes that generate this reality, the situations of social injustice and extreme poverty in which these youths live are rarely examined.

One of the main characteristics of these gangs in Mexico City is to “let themselves be seen”, to make their presence felt, and to show off with the intruders that occasionally enter their neighborhoods. This is why, it was not difficult for different government officials to enter the different underprivileged areas with the idea of promoting more formal political groups (the so called Popular Youth Councils), which would require a more detailed explanation that is beyond the scope of this work.

One year after initiating the study (December 1988) the diagnosis was completed. According to official reports there were just over 1’500 gangs in the city, territorially organized. One very revealing data was their inclination to give themselves names and assign themselves self degrading attributes that at the same time differentiated them from society, the integrated world, and defied its

values: Shit Punk, Dirty Satires, Vagrants, Defective, Amphetamines, Executors, Big Dicks, Nazis, Shaken Virginity, Punk Rats, Gone Children, Sex Lepers, Stinky Ones, Worms, Prisoners, Thieves, Jerks, Vomit, Pigs, Bastards, Amoebas, Funerals, Sex Cutters, Lone Punks. Each gang has a “diapers’ league”, a kind of a “junior league” for neighborhood children under 12. But what was the meaning of this information?

A first impression could easily fool the casual reader: 1500 gangs in the Federal District territorially organized and according to sociologists and anthropologists with specific rites and codes for entering and evolving within the internal hierarchy. The result of this partial information (although there really were some well known examples of these kinds of gangs, it was actually minimal) was a brutal mythologization of the concepts “kid” and “gang kid or band kid”, and the social result could be divided in two kinds of effect:

a) the concepts “band” or “gang kid or band kid” were popularized among the general population and a stereotype was formed that did not allow one to see the real structural situations where urban poverty (misery) originated in the youth sectors.

b) The stereotype was “bought” by both the mass media as well as the government, which in turn devoted a great deal of its effort and resources to consolidating the Popular Youth Councils (CPJ). In a short time they joined the PRI and were represented by a “gang kid” who identified himself as the General Secretary of Youth Organizations of the PRI’s executive national committee and national leader of the “youth bands”, grouping and representing (supposedly) 5000 juvenile groups and more than 10,000 gangs with employment, training and sport programs.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on something. Although the bands and the kids can be catalogued as a myth, this does not mean that poor kids do not exist. They are there, in their neighborhoods, underprivileged subdivisions and mass housing projects, standing at the corner chatting, raising money, or simply wasting time. But that is a far cry from the idea that they hold territorial structures, practice initiation rites, that they belong to the PRI and actively participate in the Popular Youth Councils. There is an abysmal difference that is decisive for the adequate planning of a social policy oriented towards these groups.

Setting aside the “gang or band” myth, there are several peculiarities that can be observed in these youngsters’ behavior. The lack of hope for the future (principally in youngsters between 16 to 20); the apathy created by surviving in a stressful financial situation; the personal refuge hiding in the group’s collective space that does not prevent introversion; the personal crises, the consumption of drugs and alcohol, and the facility to reproduce delinquent behavior that in many cases makes them become their own victims.

Nevertheless, the “dark aspect” of the diagnosis had a strong counterpart when studying their different forms of both individual and group cultural expression. In all the cases we studied, we found a positive aspect related to family, creativity, and the use of free time, in which values and identities that had apparently been lost were regained.

When drawing up a balance of that first year of work, we found an enormous amount of creativity that seemed almost hidden and that barely let us know a little about their music, about what they write about, their murals, their poetry, their traditions and their enormous desire to be listened to. Then we started the project’s second phase of the research project utilizing the Common Culture concept, developed by Paul Willis, in order to discover their natural abilities.

#### **2.4 Underprivileged Youth: Their means and its effects (1989-1992).**

The first question we had to ask ourselves was: How can we embrace the universe of underprivileged youth in Mexico City without having to fill the city with sociologists and anthropologists?

Here we had the unique opportunity of joining a completely original project.: the creation of a totally youth-run radio station (Stereo Joven 105.7 FM). Radio made what had previously seemed impossible possible in a short time. It opened up a direct channel of communication with the popular youth sectors in the city.

At this stage of the project we concentrated on recovering the main forms of youth creation and began work on three different areas.

a) A weekly radio program, on Saturday nights, to broadcast their music, read their texts and their poetry, and to put them in front of the microphone to talk openly about any subject of interest to them (AIDS, religion, police repression, sexuality, suicide, authoritarianism, etc.). The idea was simple: to reproduce (in a more organized way) the “chatting” that would take place on any popular corner in the city.

b) During the week we conducted field visits to those areas with our listeners in order to obtain more material and to establish contact with new groups.

c) When the project expanded, we created an independent civil society “Research and Project Development”, IDESPRO (informally known as the Flying Circus), with our own offices in a depressed area of town. This was responsible for coordinating the general work, organizing events and rock concerts, publishing work progress, and initiating the formation of different files (murals, poetry, literature, etc.) that would allow us to systematize future work with the youngsters.

Between 1990 and 1991 we held the first “Rock in the Asphalt Jungle” contest with a total of 164 registered amateur groups, 106 from Mexico City and

another 58 from other states in the country. With this event, which involved six months of uninterrupted work, we established communication with more than 88 professional groups from the Federal District and more than 100 from the rest of the country.

Our work team had grown in size and in professional qualifications. We were then 45 people including sound and light technicians, a systems engineer, six social workers, two sociologists, an architect, a designer, five musicians and several groups of youngsters from various parts of the city who took turns in security duties, technical support, dissemination and cleaning, among others. With this group we held more than fifty concerts in various parts of the Federal District and its metropolitan area.

Some months after the music contest, the winning groups began to record their productions and to have presentations at concerts and festivals of different kinds, from the ones for peace and against the Gulf War to strictly commercial ones.

Among the 12 winner groups in the contest was one, "The Victims of Dr. Brain" that was soon hired by a transnational production company and taken to Los Angeles to record and became a success. This in turn reinforced the Mexican rock market that already existed (with original non-commercial music) as well as the rest of the underground music groups that exist in the city.

The basis for the project had been established. We would use popular culture as a means of developing the integration of values among the different extremes in Mexican society through sharing common languages.

But not all the environment was favorable for the project. The Secretariat of the Interior received complaints about the kind of language used on the radio station, also about the informal way the program was conducted, the many documented violations of the Radio and Television General Law which does not contemplate in any way these "excesses". Combined with this, the sudden resignation of the IMER (Mexican Institute for the Radio) director occurred and the entry of a new work team with a new set of rules and a more commercial project. This was the beginning for us to come off the air.

From 1989 to 1992 and for 144 Saturdays, we broadcast the program "For Gangs Only: a Space Closer than Rock" live. There was great pressure by some newspapers that were scared because of the "rough language" utilized at the station and consequently began to call us "Radio Rebel" accusing us of trying to agitate and subvert youngsters.

The new IMER director ordered the inclusion in our program of commercials every 15 minutes inviting youngsters to join the army or the navy. He also introduced a 30-minute recorded newsreel about government policy and at midnight decided to play the national anthem (as all other radio stations do, but we

had decided to play it once the program was over rather than in the middle of it). His assistants began to restrict the entrance of guest kids and a special police operation arrested the youngsters near the station because they looked suspicious. They really wanted to finish us.

The situation quickly deteriorated in a couple of weeks. The IMER directors closed the door to us and the disappearance of Stereo Joven as such was decided on, from above. We asked for letters from our listeners which we began to read on the air. The last subjects on the programs were about freedom of speech, a concert against being muzzled, and the listeners' letters. In the last program aired, we "took the station" for two hours to avoid the commercials and the unnecessary cuts, and we talked about authoritarianism, about the verticality of the Mexican system and the obstacle this represents for democracy, freedom of speech, and for the solution of specific problems such as gang kids. The program ended with the announcement that we would continue working at the Flying Circus offices.

Forcibly withdrawn from our offices and without the possibility of having access in any way to radio communication, we started to receive letters of solidarity with the program and the visits of many of our listeners, bringing material and offering their labor unconditionally until we found a new space.

In July 1992 we began classifying all the materials we had managed to collect during those four years of fieldwork. This resulted in a series of files and directories with very diverse materials: a record file (approximately 1'950 records and tapes); a popular muralism file (approximately 3'500 pictures); a file of marginal publishings; a file on popular poetry (in process); a thematic file on contemporary youth music (in process); and several directories.

The work was reorganized and new responsibilities and new schedules established. The team was reduced to 12 members. We began to donate our "free time" in order to dedicate ourselves to find a place in which to put together the ideas and the experiences that we had accumulated. This brought us to the third stage in our work.

## **2.5 The professionalization of work with youngsters (1993-1997).**

We still had the experience of our past work fresh in our memories. We had built our primary files. There was now a musical and thematic classification. How could we continue with these tools?

Thus we submitted a radio project, but this time to a private radio, ACIR group, where we began broadcasting 100 one-hour thematic programs with underground rock music, juvenile texts and music (original, non-commercial pieces), "The Tunnel: an underground step closer" that began being aired on Friday nights at ten pm on 1560 AM radio.

Simultaneously, we produced several video cycles for the Popular Arts Museum, music classes and silk screen processing workshops.

From then on and despite the complex political and economical problems that have existed in Mexico since the end of 1993, we managed to get the use of the old Francisco Villa cinema, an old, abandoned locale in an underprivileged area in the Federal District. The place had 3'000 seats and even though it was in poor condition, it was an opportunity to build our longed-for space for collective work with the groups.

The building was lent to us in November 1994 and two years ago it was still not completely remodeled; everything imaginable has been repaired: pipes, cables, toilets, leaks, seats, warehouse, marquee, etc. with more will than resources, but with the firm idea of opening it to the public.

During its remodeling the youngsters that we had contacted at previous stages of the investigation and some others from the vicinity participated actively. This work eventually contributed to the integration of a work group that soon made the space its own, contributing in many instances with their own material such as paint and tools.

## **2.6 The experience with the first two elected Federal District governments (1997-2003).**

In December 1997, for the first time in many years, citizens in Mexico City had the opportunity of electing their government officials; this was important because an opposition party won the elections.

With the PRI out of the city government, and certainly with the loss of the presidency, in the already historical July 2 elections of 2000, great expectations for changes were raised from which youth as a social section were not isolated. As is natural with a new political class in power, it may seem early to make an evaluation about their juvenile policies, although its profile has already begun to be defined.

As in any project of this nature, one of the main problems we have had to face is the ongoing shortage of financing. Constantly we have had to seek funding, which has taken up a great deal of our time and efforts.

The first elected government in the city launched an investment program for social projects in conjunction with the Dutch agency NOVIB. "Circo Volador" as the project is informally known immediately established contact with the authorities. We submitted the project and the results that it had achieved after more than ten years of work. The evaluation of the project was very favorable and thanks to that we were included in the joint investment program GDF-NOVIB.

Besides this, the project received financial support, although almost a symbolic amount, from Ashoka, an international agency dedicated to providing financing for entrepreneurs and social projects. As it is known, the dependence of a project on the government in many cases ends up subjugating the project. That is why one of the main objectives is that in a medium term the project should be self-sustainable.

Once installed in a physical space, the first thing we had to do was to get acquainted with the youngsters in that place to whom we wanted to direct our work. We drew up a social diagnosis that had as its main objective a general profile of the community and its youth in particular. We needed to detect their problems, anxieties, wishes, but most of all their abilities and potential.

As a result of this diagnosis, we began to offer the activities already present in the physical space: courses on painting, photography, capoeira dance, craft jewelry workshops, conferences, rock concerts, expositions, performances and reading circles.

Today, the place has transcended the community and started to become a meeting place for the different youth groups in this enormous city. The project has been reinforced by the return to radio with a program that is broadcast twice a week by Radio Red, in which the youngsters present their views on a range of subjects. Besides, the program has served as a means of communication between the different youth groups that see culture as an unsurpassed means of expression.

The program has also special information on exhibitions, concerts, movies, music clinics, conferences, courses, etc. on the subjects that the youngsters look for, with the information they need, but translated into their language and in a way they can assimilate and transmit.

But this is just one part of the work, since the real challenge is to convince, negotiate, agree, and defend the project from the corresponding authorities. At this moment, due to merely administrative and bureaucratic matters, the building is closed, but we are sure that it will be reopened very soon. Like other governments, the present one sees the development of our project with distrustful eyes. Today we continue sitting in the officials' waiting rooms, avoiding being absorbed, asking for the necessary support, offering the projects and trying to turn this utopia into a reality.

We know, as Néstor Garcia Canclini puts it, that in our society the cultural wealth that is appreciated is that of the dominant groups: the writings of the peasants, workers or poor youngsters are not filed, nor do their humble dwellings receive the attention given to historical sites. But we think that in order for a social policy to be efficient, it must consider the real needs of the underprivileged classes; otherwise it will be destined to fail.

The “Circo Volador’s” action-research continues today with a clear sign of activism and participation, which has only been possible thanks to the trust generated in both sectors, between the kids and us, between reality and theory. But we need to wait a little longer to know the final outcome of this story.

## **2.7 The Methodological Proposal.**

In this sense, both the work method and the strategy are schematically explained in Diagram1 -see next page- where an “imaginary social limit” is proposed between the two extremes that constitute an excluded society (or exclusive ones) like the Mexican one.

Our work begins from this “social limit” downwards “A”, with groups from the poor, underprivileged, less favored or marginal groups. Once in touch with these groups we establish relationships, conduct different studies, verify hypotheses, make files with the different working materials that we have collected, and design all kinds of work proposals, (depending on the particular objectives of each group, there may be differences in the proposals), which include talents, potential, strengthening and bonding aspects in such groups.

Afterwards we access a different space, “B”, which in this case is The Flying Circus seen as an infrastructure for social care, where we begin to introduce these proposals.

Step “B” does not necessarily imply the use of the Flying Circus’s physical space since it can be substituted by a radio program, a musical or poetry contest, a printing shop, a photography dark room or a recording studio. Of course having the Circus, which has a seating capacity of 2’500, facilitates interaction between the youth groups and is an important visual element for the overall project.

The activities in this space permit a reevaluation of the youngsters’ creative work, to coordinate the inclusion of the different proposals, to open the doors to the broadcast and participation of the mass communication media and to invite the middle and upper youth sectors in the city, located in “C”, so that they can learn and know about these realities that are sometimes hidden and hardly known and in most cases incomprehensible unless there is a more polished interpretation of the alternative expressions of the underprivileged youth culture in the city. (See diagram 1).

The final idea is to be able to establish a common language between the different sectors in Mexican society that facilitates communication between the different social strata and permits the development of common, shared projects.

## **3) MODEL OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**



I will now review the second applied research project. One of the main features for the design of “public policy”, understood as an element that will lend society cohesion, was the need to incorporate both the diagnoses and the proposed forms of dealing with the community, into the “Cultural Dimension” of the social groups.

Generically speaking, the objectives of national projects generally stipulate the need for a link between education, employment and the socio-demographic differences in each region, to foster the economic development of the collectivity. However, there is now a worldwide consensus that the development and growth of countries cannot solely be measured by macroeconomic indicators such as inflation control, the increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) or in the increase in the Economically Active Population rates (EAP), since the development of nations is indissolubly linked to the well-being of their inhabitants and their cultural and social development, which, at the microsocial level, reflect the true level of progress of society as a whole.

Anthropologist Néstor García Canclini drew up a typology of the various paradigms of cultural policies that have historically been found in Latin American societies (García Canclini). I would like to take up the last of these, which has recently begun to emerge in societies and which is directly linked to the democratization of Latin American nations.

Just as the previous project included Paul Willis’ conceptual proposal about “Common Culture” which enabled the links between research and youth to be strengthened—in this case, we incorporated García Canclini’s proposal on “Participatory Democracy” which refers to the activity of groups or individuals and the direct participation of the latter in the processes of creation and consumption. Participatory democracy is “one of the strong signs of renewal of the political scene...and constitutes one of the many attempts to engage in politics with the popular sectors in order to guarantee the rights of these classes to have democratic relations and political initiatives in areas from which they have always been included” (García Canclini, 1987).

This paradigm is promoted by progressive parties and independent popular movements and is based on popular participation and the self-managed organization of civil society. This model is used as an attempt to identify the plural development of cultures and all groups in relation to their own needs, which are concerned with guaranteeing autonomous development and egalitarian relations for each individual and for the different forms of social expression.

In “participatory democracy,” “cultural action” seen in the broad, continuous sense of looking for new spaces, is more important than reducing culture to a purely aesthetic or analytical matter. Participation enables one to establish the basis for the development of collective creation, which creates its works and consumption and which affirms, changes or renews individuals’ identity.

In keeping with this proposal, attempts were made to establish a policy of social development that would begin by identifying the skills and potentials of the various groups-beginning with the poorest-to reinforce their local and regional identity with the aim of gradually reconstructing the social fabric through joint actions involving work and recreation.

In order to adapt García Canclini's scheme to a general policy of social development, we began with three basic concepts that reinforced social practices in the community; a) promoting popular participation; b) fostering the self-managed organization of collective activities and c) accepting the plurality of social groups vis-à-vis their own needs. These are indispensable conditions, without which a project of this nature is unlikely to advance, since the economic-political situations of each case play a key role in the future of this type of projects.

The specific form of work was based on three crucial elements for its development:

a) The diagnosis, which enabled us to establish the conceptual and empirical parameters of the situation we wished to observe, i.e. demography, economics, infrastructure and studies on everyday life.

b) Direct work: which established direct points of contact with various groups: women, children, handicapped people, youth, street children, senior citizens, single mothers, etc. which enabled us to discover their most urgent needs, their forms of social organization, their skills, potential and in general their specific needs as key elements for designing the initial work strategies.

c) Social integration, which, as a result of the combination of the two previous elements, enabled us to present a positive image of the most disadvantaged groups to the middle and upper sectors of society, in order to encourage their participation, integration and support, which were then reflected in common actions and practices for the benefit of the collectivity.

There are obviously countless variables referring to the structural and political situation that the group was undergoing at the time, such as corruption, unfulfilled political promises, an inadequate or non-existent infrastructure for providing care, and the existence of organized pressure groups, which forced us to reformulate our specific objectives for each case in particular. That is why it is important not to lose sight of the basic aspects of participatory democracy described by García Canclini in his proposal, which enable one to reinforce the new means of integrating and structuring social identities through the use of popular and common culture.

All this served to promote social development as a means of encouraging the integration of values between the different extremes of society through the achievement and dissemination of common actions. If one wished to talk about a philosophy surrounding this proposal, it would undoubtedly involve the idea of the Reconstruction of Social Fabric.

In the context of this project, the principal lines of action focussed on the expansion of educational coverage, culture, health, sport and recreation, through a significant increase in the quality of public services for the population, the reinforcement of social and community organization, specialized attention for vulnerable groups and the creation of community support networks.

The initial diagnosis focussed on four points: 1) the socio-economic and political characteristics of the community 2) the geographical characteristics of the borough, 3) the evaluation of social programs applied previously 4) the care infrastructure available when we came in to start the project. This enabled us to draw up a social map of the area which would enable us to evaluate the resources available for meeting the demands of the community and requesting the necessary budgetary increases for the improvement of the latter, in addition to recovering and identifying successful programs carried out earlier, as well as the profile required for the creation of “new programs”, the formulation of institutional agreements to support the strategies that had been planned and finally, the integration of programs, both successful old and new programs in keeping with the situations detected.

The main programs for social development and fostering self-managing groups were aimed at the areas of health, education, culture, sports, recreation, training and employment, productive development, the restoration of values and traditions, social prevention, and the reinforcement of citizenship and regional development, all specifically related to the social groups identified by age, gender or particular conditions of social marginalization.

These programs were designed to deal with various levels of need, whether individual, familial or community (regional) depending on the characteristics of the problems and the social groups involved. In order to implement these actions, it is impossible to think of a single, unilateral action by the government as the only organization responsible for the latter, since, because of the “reduction of the state” as a result of the neoliberal economic policies of the past twenty years, the government has increasingly sought support from other sectors of society to achieve sustainable development.

At the same time, the implementation of a model of this nature seeks to achieve a social effect that will be reflected in the reinforcement of the institutional image, the restoration of the population’s belief in the actions of the government and the expansion of service coverage, in order to restore the presence of the latter. Thus, at the same time, emphasis should be placed on civic self-management as a formula for community work and on the dissemination of the positive experiences of these programs in other spheres of the community in order to encourage their continuity.

Diagram 2 shows the scheme used in the Social Development Model for Mexico City utilized from 1997 to 2000 in the Alvaro Obregón borough whose objectives are presented at different levels:

**At the conceptual level,** according to the scheme, beginning from the “imaginary social limit” and moving towards direction A with the most disadvantaged or marginalized groups it was possible to identify the groups, discover their values, detect their needs and hopes and identify the skills that could be incorporated into an organized work proposal. Efforts were subsequently made to gain access to “B” to develop different types of attention, such as courses, community service programs, programs to encourage employment, the prevention of addictions and reproductive health, to mention just a few. This enabled us to open up public spaces to participation in the collective work of communities as well as revealing the possibility of giving them presence through the media and by inviting the middle and upper sectors of society to focus their direct support on a strategy of common interest. This experience led to the central objective C which is to promote social development as a means of encouraging the integration of values between the different extremes of society through the formation and dissemination of common actions, with specific objectives and observable, measurable results.

**At the population level:** the first important point is that from the outset, this was proposed as a project to be implemented “with the population” in other words, not only “for the population” or “belonging to the population” but rather with the population as a central participant in this work. Attempts were made to train and professionalize groups’ potential, skills and abilities so that they themselves would use their knowledge in community, collective work.

**At the state level:** there are two problems that the population has continuously experienced in its relationship with government authorities, namely the lack of training and knowledge of the majority of government officials (who generally occupy their posts for a period of three years or less), of government functions-there is no professional training given for this type of job, for example, and what is popularly known as “classic official responses” which are anachronistic, untimely, lack consensus, improvised, have no basis, poorly planned or authoritarian. For this reason and in order to reconstruct the relationship between the population and local government, the project strove to achieve the professionalization of government areas, establish simple, clear collaboration agreements, create new inter-institutional agreements at the different levels of government, encourage agreement and negotiation as a response to any type of pressure and finally, encourage organized civic self-management.

**At the level of civil society:** the promotion strategy was designed to encourage community participation, consolidate a group of habitual attendees so that they would become the direct beneficiaries of the projects and prepare various community campaigns that would encourage local residents to actively and directly evaluate the project’s actual progress.

**At the level of applied research:** we proposed the creation of common languages and actions based on the groups’ creative potential, without overlooking

or ignoring the profound social inequalities. To this end, we suggested beginning with a real situation-that of the most impoverished and needy-by coming into contact with the other groups, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, in order to be able to give them specific projects, in specific areas where collective interests converge, with the aim of their eventually becoming self-managed. The long-term view of this applied research proposal seeks the participation of all social groups so that they will contribute their knowledge, financial and human resources and their new work proposals, together with any type of initiative that would enable them to combine their efforts in specific areas and periods, in order to be able to create an idea that was sufficiently established in society that would facilitate the transmission of the experiences and knowledge acquired to broader sectors of the population.

Despite this enormous efforts, the current, specific results of the implementation of this Model leave a lot to be desired, not because it did not work, which it did at one time, but because at the end of 2000, a right-wing party (PAN) won the following local elections in the Borough and immediately cancelled all the programs established by the previous administration, reinstating the old welfare-based view of the state, which merely constitutes further proof of the political barbarity with which Latin America's incipient democracies are faced, whose variability continues to determine the continent's longed-for social development as it will undoubtedly continue to do so for many years to come.

#### **4.) CONCLUSIONS**

In recent years, social policies for the popular classes and marginalized sectors have failed to deal with the problems for which they were designed. These policies have been characterized by being specific, highly-focussed, minimal, intermittent and segmented, which, instead of achieving the objectives of integration, reinforced social isolation and exclusion as a result of the growing loss of confidence in public institutions.

Consequently, we operated from the premise that only an integral proposal would be able to offer a response to the problems of the marginalized population and that this proposal should involve:

- Drawing up an economic and geographical diagnosis of everyday events that would provide extensive information on the structural and socio-cultural situation of the group involved.
- Providing direct work programs "with specific social groups" as important, decisive actors in the projects.
- Professionalizing the work carried out from public administration offices.
- Systematically evaluating the various work strategies and
- Ensuring that the proposal is democratic, participatory, inclusive and self-managing and that it will include the various cultural proposals of groups and their needs.

A work proposal of this nature is unable to deal with all the specific situations that may emerge in any more or less similar community, although it does aim to reinforce the creation of networks of social integration, support the reevaluation of the social practices of the various social groups and segments that prevent the psychological destruction of individuals, reduce social pathologies and anomie and create a solid, purposeful image of specific experiences that will enable one to recreate the common, popular culture that links society to common objectives of progress and development.

One of the current main advantages of the Social Sciences and obviously Sociology is the enormous amount of disciplines with which it can share its work in an interdisciplinary fashion, such as statistics, demography, law, medicine, anthropology, engineering, psychology, communication, architecture, social work, ethnology, public administration, marketing and even advertising, all in combination with the powerful technological tools that give one access to virtually instantaneous information to obtain accurate “social photographs” of the environments one is attempting to understand.

From the point of view of social research, there is an age-old debate between “empiricism” and “theory” which often mutually despise each other quite unnecessarily. That is why I feel that the construction of Models that provide one with a multidisciplinary perspective on work-in a sort of search for a “lost Utopia” is an effective scheme for reducing these conceptual differences. Theory undoubtedly plays a key role in analytically understanding the global phenomena that permeate society horizontally, vertically and horizontally-such as exclusion, marginalization, social movements, financial dependence or the “Development of Underdevelopment” to paraphrase the title of André Gunder Frank’s book. “Change” however, requires local work, within very narrow geographical spheres, that will reinforce social identities and increase civic participation by re-valuing their individual action so that they can discover, through the combination of efforts and actual facts, the transformations and transfers proposed by science. It is essential that citizens feel confident enough to be able to form groups and to participate, while maintaining their independence from government institutions, without the influence of political parties<sup>4</sup> which interfere with these mediations. In other words, the proposals should emerge from the community itself and remain within it and the programs should be “politician-proof” so to speak.

The business of constructing Social Policies must be analyzed from the perspective of the state as a promoter of the latter, but there is also the possibility of ignoring this issue in order to avoid the complex government labyrinths, which

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<sup>4</sup> The struggles between political parties and within them to gain access to “Power” and stay in power have reached absurd levels in Mexico. For example, during the 2003 elections, of the 16 Political Delegates, 11 resigned so that they could embark on a political pre-campaign to gain a seat in the Assembly of Representatives or as Federal Deputies, abandoning the posts to which they had been elected a year before the three years that their period of public administration lasts.

has to do with reinforcing citizenship. Thus, applied research encourages the transformation of sociology into a sort of social engineering, which learns to build bridges between the various social groups: access roads to services for the most underprivileged as well as local roads that enable one to integrate communities in new ways, based on their culture, their potential and in general all the elements that reinforce their sense of belonging to their places of origin.

Only in as much as applied research manages to enable members of a community to understand that they are strategic participants in development, rather than merely “beneficiaries” or spectators of politics, in accordance with what a community expects and understands by its notion of development, together with the shift from the concept of “population” to “citizenship” will the community be able to counteract the damaging power still wielded by politics.

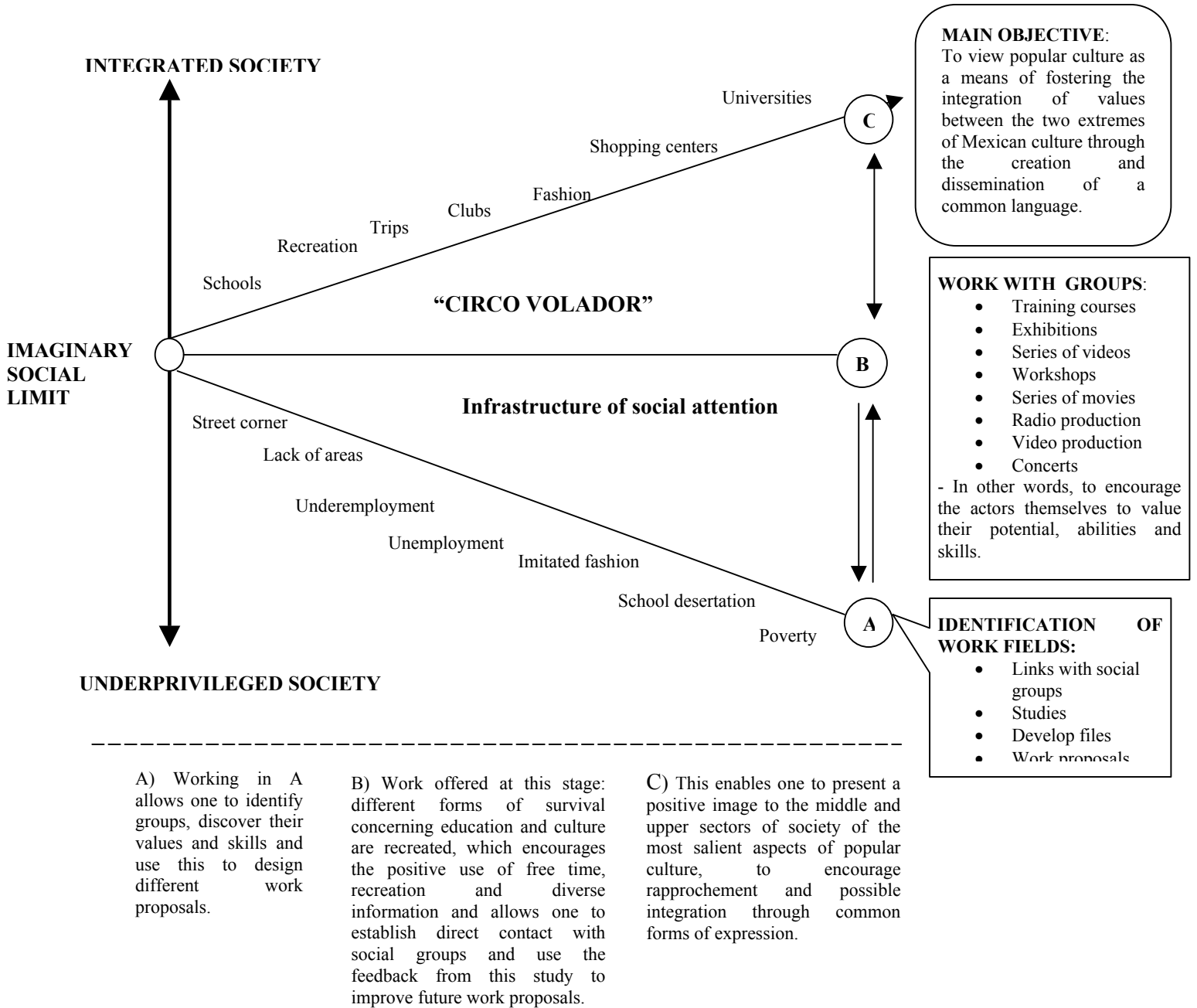
The limits of the relationship between science and society are still largely linked to people’s creative capacity and to the way they participate in decision-making. Likewise, the scope of the development of applied research will have to face the enormous challenge of constructing a “new citizen” on the basis of the recognition and reinforcement of its positive social practices. This is why the sociologist’s work should begin with more general questions, explore the most elementary forms of social organization and work with them, in a direct application of knowledge to improve people’s material living conditions and use what C.W. Mills so aptly called “The Sociological Imagination,” believe in Utopias and think whether it might be possible to reorient sociological work within a multi- and transdisciplinary logic to begin the construction of genuine Applied Social Engineering.

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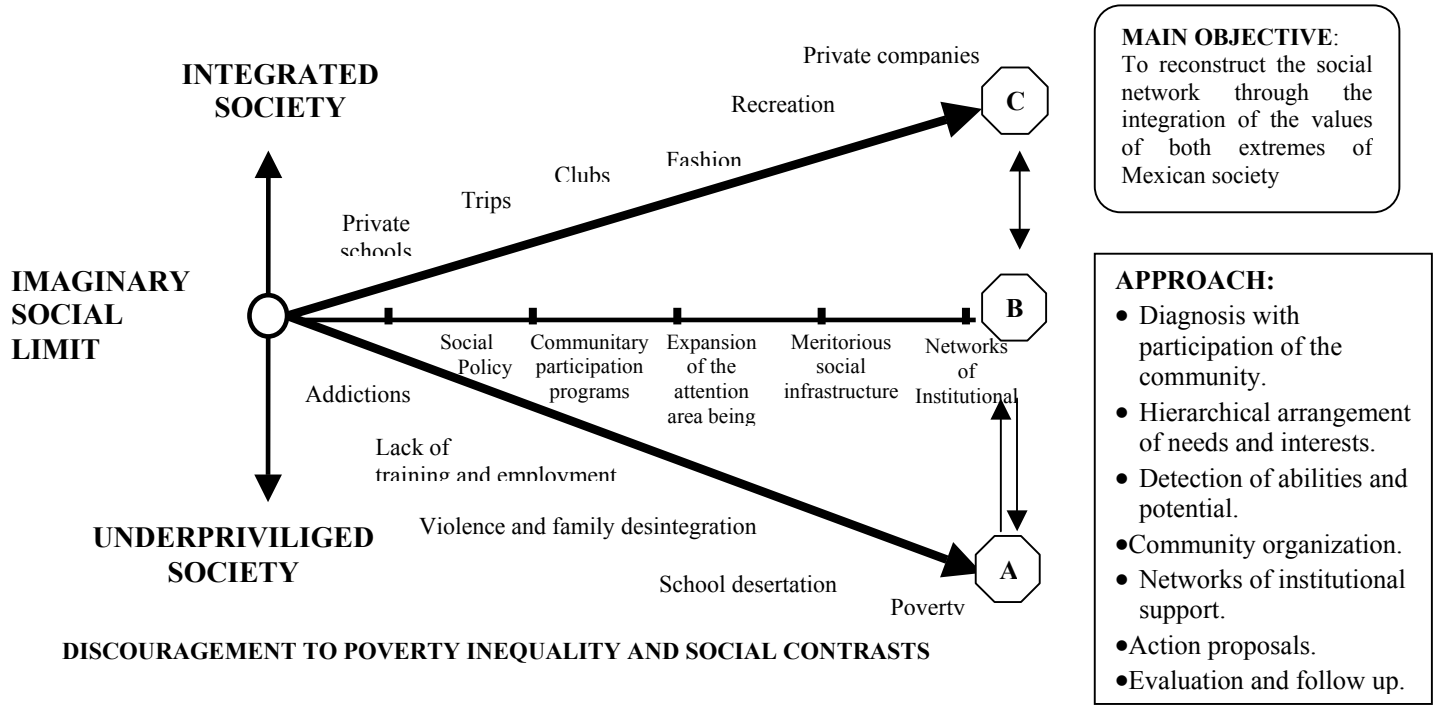
**DIAGRAM 1. YOUTH AND CULTURE IN MEXICO CITY**



Source: Direct research

**DIAGRAM 2. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

**TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK – SOCIAL INTEGRATION**



**DISCOURAGEMENT TO POVERTY INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL CONTRASTS**

**A) APPROACHING GROUPS.**

Government work allows one to identify the groups, discover their values and skills and then use this to design different work proposals.

**B) INSTITUTIONAL EMPOWERMENT**

Work is offered at this stage; different forms of survival are recreated, education and culture are brought closer; and efforts are made to encourage the positive use of free time, provide recreation and information, establish direct contact with social groups and use the feedback from this study to improve future work proposals.

**C) SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

This allows one to present a positive image to the middle and upper sectors of society with the salient aspects of popular culture to encourage rapprochement and possible integration through common forms of expression.

Source: Direct research