
«Youth» in Cuba

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"Cuban youth is at the center of all processes, is consolidated and launched into the future and we are confident in its skill to advance in the construction of socialism," said José Ramón Machado Ventura, second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), when speaking - according to the report of the Cuban News Agency - at the Closing Assembly XI Congress of the Young Communist League in Sancti Spiritus, held on the last day of January.

But how is that Cuban youth? Or rather ask: What are these youths like? Because the diversity of this population group demands it. What are the trends and challenges that currently identify them?

Before the mirror

Taking a look around in any Cuban public space, one of the first singularities that stands out is the abundance of elder people.

Demographic statistics support this observation. On this Island, only 33% of its inhabitants are 24 years old or younger and within a decade, by 2030, the young population of this geography will be less than a third of a total: 29.2%, according to projections of the National Office for Statistics and Information.

This is the case in Cuba while in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, about half of the population is 24 years old or younger.

It might not be easy to be young among so many elders because, this single demographic condition, means for young people to take on roles and dynamics that previous generations did not carry so much weight on their shoulders: caring for the elderly, living in families where adults are majority, as well as entering jobs and political spaces where adults, increasingly older, with mind frame and behaviors of their respective generations prevail.

On top of this we must add the new socio-economic realities that appeared on the Island, based on the coexistence of state-owned, non-state, and cooperative management. This diversification, in correspondence with the update of the Cuban economic and social model, has opened new forms of employment and jobs «that have a special impact on the daily practices of youth, it creates new references and goals, and generate tensions for the economic and social dynamics, in which youth groups are increasingly becoming important performers ».

Thus is summarized in the research "The Cuban Youth in the Context of Updating the Economic and Social Model", by a group of experts lead by Dr. María Isabel Domínguez, Senior Researcher and Coordinator of the Group of Studies on Youth of the Psychological and Sociological Research Center of CITMA.

Included in the volume ***Youth and Childhood in the Current Latin American and Caribbean Scenario***, published by the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, this research has served as source for this article in its entirety.

Information and communications technologies (ICT), although some adults may still underestimate them with pejorative expressions such as "those little devices," are also an issue that is equally decisively impacting on how young people are in Cuba.

As backbone of the computerization of society, ICTs are increasingly winning ground on the Island, and the uses given by some youth sectors, according to the aforementioned study, generate new ways of assuming and producing culture, of social organization and participation, they reconfigure power relations and certain citizen practices.

Foreign and domestic migration from the national territory, remittances, increased hostilities on behalf of the U.S. government towards Cuba also sign the life of young people in Cuba.

As a large part of Cubans under 24 years old study, also transformations that have taken place in the educational panorama such as those related to the continuity of studies, also mark the course and impact in that difficult task of being young.

In particular, the relevance given by the country, in response to the economic needs, to

university studies with a technical and agricultural profile, as well as favoring technical or trade education as a continuity of studies for high school graduates, has generated «contradictions between motivations and personal goals of youngsters and the social needs and demands», quoted the aforementioned research.

On the field of employment and work, on the other hand, also raises new changes and new visions for young Cubans: more than the third of freelancers in Cuba are young, and, as a trend, their insertion into these spaces have been faster than that of the adult population.

It's not a minor fact that increases the proportion of women in non-state sector positions associated with the so-called traditional gender roles such as food processing and sales, hired for domestic work and others, thus reproducing gender inequities.

All in all and as a trend, «there are two great options for youth coexist regarding jobs. On the one hand, state employment, which offers greater chances for professional development and improvement, as well as labor and security guarantees, but with salaries that often do not cover the needs and, on the other hand, private, better paid employment, with greater autonomy to develop their own work strategy, although many of the activities involve the underuse of knowledge and skills, as well as the emergence of new scenarios with lower labor guarantees ... ».

The research mentioned also points out how «for many young people, self-employment has been their first work experience».

The Moment is Yours

What's been said so far are just pieces of the complex and beautiful picture that make up young Cubans.

Colors and hues are so many in this population segment, that it would be impossible to summarize them. However, although heterogeneity is today one of its distinctive features, it's possible to ensure that they are children of their time, marked by a dialogue of learning and reciprocal growth among the generations that today live in this Island.

Young Cubans know that the economic development of this country, and the future of every work built by their parents and grandparents, is in their hands today. That's why the first secretary of the Young Communist League, Susely Morfa González, recently assured: «This is our moment and nobody can take it away from us».

"They are our inspiration and confidence in the future," the Cuban president highlighted at the International Youth Day. The confidence in that guarantee of continuity was the one that walked with Raul and President Miguel Díaz-Canel last January 28th, among a sea of ??torches that, in youthful hands, paid tribute to Martí on the anniversary of his birth.

