

# Modernity, Individualization and the Resilient Response of Young People

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## Abstract

The phenomenon of "individualization" is an effect of advanced modernization. The characteristics of individualization are the loss of labor and social benefits as a result of labor deregulation, the substitution of temporal jobs for permanent ones and an increase of responsibilities in self. Therefore the young people must grow and live in a turbulent environment of economic instability and social uncertainty.

This paper analyzes the concept of resilience of young people living "at the border of chaos" in the context of complex adaptive dynamic systems

**Keywords:** Individualization, young people resilience, complex adaptive systems

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Social analysis as those by Ulrich Beck (2006), Castilla (2009), Arriagada (2007), Tiramonti (2006), García-Cancelini (2013) focused the phenomenon of "individualization" as an effect of advanced modernization. The characteristics of individualization are the loss of labor and social securities as a result of labor deregulation, the substitution of temporal jobs for permanent ones and an increase of responsibilities in self. Therefore the young people must grow and live in a turbulent environment of economic instability and social uncertainty.

These living conditions of young people and much of the population are against the principles of equity, social welfare and progress and show the serious drawbacks of the current neoliberal economic model.

Taking into account these problems, Grotberg (2003) defines resilience as the universal human capacity to cope with adversity, overcome and even be transformed by it. Resilience depends from the skills and talents that the actor must develop to handle this instability, identifying action opportunities in his social context in order to make decisions and plan his path in the medium term.

The study of resilience investigates on the factors and mechanisms allowing people to have a good quality of life, despite the adverse conditions. Resilience includes various abilities and systemic processes associated with successful adaptations to threatening contexts. It has been understood as the result of the interaction between (internal)

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attributes of the individual and the (external) family, social and cultural environment, which allow overcoming risk and adversity constructively. Accordingly, resilience is not only an individual phenomenon but it is related significantly to the external environment. This paper analyzes the concept of resilience of young people living "at the border of chaos" in the context of complex adaptive dynamic systems, where the principles of Socio-cybernetics and Complexity Sciences such as, self-organization, cooperation, emergence, negative feedback, dynamic homeostasis, and resilience, help to analyze and explain their emergent culture.

### **Conceptual Frame.**

The concept of resilience was born in the early eighties as opposed to the concept of vulnerability. The study of resilience focuses on inquire about the mechanisms and protective factors in people, allowing them to have a good quality of life, despite the adverse conditions they face (Werner & Smith 1982, Rutter 1993, Kotliarenco 1997). Resilience as a dynamic construct includes various phenomena related to successful adaptations to threatening contexts. It has been understood as the result of the interaction between the internal attributes of the individual and his social, family and cultural external environment that allows overcoming risks constructively. Resilience is related with the concept of homeostasis as functional balance and dynamic stability.

Vanistendael (1994) distinguishes three levels of resilience: 1) to protect life itself, 2) to build a positive vital behavior, despite difficult circumstances, 3) to face the difficulties from a socially acceptable form. He argues that resilience includes the ability of a person or social system to adequately address the difficulties. These three levels refer to different actions because usually every human being tends to ward off threats to life, but not every human being has the possibility to build positive vital behavior in difficult circumstances. Velázquez (2002) mentioned that in the area of sociology resilience is understood as a process or the ability to achieve a successful adaptation despite challenging circumstances. As can be seen, the conceptual discourse on resilience emphasizes mechanisms and protective factors during rough times, as well as successful adaptations and balance. However, we believe that the theoretical framework of complex adaptive dynamical systems adds analytical dimensions and a dynamic perspective to existing theories. It is not important to talk only about protection or adaptation, but to consider the transition to other forms of emerging organization, which will help understand the responses of young people to the individualizing effects of modernity.

Homeostasis is the ability to maintain a constant internal environment in response to external environmental changes. The concept of homeostasis was introduced by physiologist Walter B. Cannon in 1930 and applied to the analysis of social systems by Talcott Parsons in 1951. In 1948 the original concept of homeostasis was extended by psychiatrist Walter Ross Ashby in his article "Design for a Brain" that conceptualizes homeostasis as navigation in the space of control parameters, looking for a combination that keeps the various system variables in survival range.

Homeostasis faces two types of change (Marion 1999):

- A) The continuous incremental change, which refers to the navigation in a region of the state space without experiencing a significant change.
- B) The change of region in the state space, through a bifurcation or separatrix, implying destabilize the system and push it to another attractor. In this case the system needs a dynamic homeostasis. Then the system should look for new behavior patterns that enable its survival or the return to its original homeostatic operationalizing attractor. It is oriented to maintain fitness or to improve it. In this response there is learning, innovation, adaptation, maintaining a functional balance through a dynamic stability, i.e., it has both stable and unstable characteristics. It is navigation at the "edge of chaos" (Marion 1999)

## **Patterns of Interaction, Feedback and Cooperation**

The characteristics of complex adaptive dynamical systems arise from the interaction, positive feedback and cooperative relationships with other agents in the environment (people, groups, institutions), thus they have an autopoietic behavior (Luhmann, 2012). Interaction patterns between systems can take place under certain conditions, organizing in different areas of life a new emerging order. These systems move slowly between states moderately de-structured in relation to their experience and learning. In these processes we find creativity and innovation (Marion 1999).

The adaptation of a system depends on its fitness in the given environment to achieve its objectives and perform its functions in that environment. Its suitability will depend on the functional homeostasis as well as of the states of the environment with which it interacts.

### **The Mexican Young Artist Case**

A research conducted by Gerber and Pinochet (2013), entitled "Economías creativas y economías domésticas en el trabajo artístico joven " (Creative Economies and households in the artistic work of young people) aims to better understand the ways in which young Mexican artists conceive, implement cultural projects, develop skills and resources and implement tactics to cope with job insecurity and lack of social benefits. The research findings are supported by 60 interviews with young people aged between 25 and 35, in Mexico City.

Being a research integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, its results have enough information to take a complex dynamic systems approach, seeking to answer the following questions:

How self-organize and interact professionally youth living in unstable social conditions? . Which attractors guide them to self-organization?

What kind of learning promotes their adaptation as system structure?

What patterns of interaction, feedback and cooperation develop?

In their adaptation which creativity and innovation processes can be identified?

Where their dynamic stability is observed?

What is the conceptual analytical potential of complex adaptive dynamic systems approach on the concept of resilience?

### **Analysis**

At the core of the complex adaptive dynamic system are young visual artists and cultural producers whose socioeconomic status is located in the middle class, undergraduate educational level and call themselves as independent professionals.

For analytical purposes we will distinguish as subsystems first the one based on their cultural projects and then as second the survival subsystem. Homeostatic interrelationships between both subsystems and the different areas of the environment are the target of this systemic analysis.

#### **a) The cultural projects.**

In the cultural projects subsystem of the visual artists their action patterns are recognized in their interactions, positive feedbacks and cooperation. There is feedback for their work with individuals, groups and institutions in the art world. Furthermore, there is mutual cooperation by exchanging knowledge and services with peers according to their occupational specialty, which reduces them costs.

Regarding their cultural projects the young artists are freelance and their projects are

sporadic. Therefore they interact with various educational and governmental institutions from the artistic field and also with agents that have nothing to do with this field. They also interact with art galleries and collectors.

The way how this young people classify and process information about the resources that come to them from the environment, and identify ways to maintain their fitness, can be observed in their homeostatic feedback processes. This feedback arises from the interactions of professional work that keeps them active and informed in the field, allowing them to acquire different experiences and professional abilities, stay related, to be informed and involved in government grants where the state is the major sponsor of artistic activities or private institutions. Patterns of feedback of the artists are not stable but dynamic, and this is valuable for them because their feedback with different agents and producers, with different scenarios for presenting their work, are a source of creativity. This dynamic feedback set a wide network of young visual artists. In this homeostatic action there is learning, innovation, dynamic adaptation, i.e. it has both stable and unstable characteristics.

In their dynamic adaptive processes seek in their environment the means for their self-management practices, being therefore autopoietic. A major attractor in their dynamics is his art project .

Young artists declare to be independent professionals but their projects are the main driver to navigate and recreate their fitness as they have close relationship with their self-management practices that do not generate more income but experimental spaces or collaborative platforms. There is a direct relationship between self-management, their artistic projects and their dynamic homeostasis.

Another important characteristic of their dynamics and autopoietic adaptation is the cooperation because it produces its artistic activities together in collaboration. Young visual artists seek flexible ways of grouping in collaborative processes that support individuality and personal projects of its members. This allows them to participate in a large number of simultaneous artistic initiatives. Is this daily coexistence and collaboration that makes these young professionals to value their work and lifestyle.

#### **b ) The way of life subsystem of young visual artists.**

The steady-state of the way of life subsystem characterizing the lives of these young people is to have sporadic jobs, underemployment or unemployment periods, where their internal self-regulation processes are essential to maintain their existence. They look for ways to adapt and feed back through cooperation including exchange services or mutual support, sharing expenses. The way they seek internal self-regulation to maintain their standard of living is to resort to small savings for times of lower workload. They require order and much austerity in their household budgets. They learn to think in the medium term and manage sporadic revenue throughout the months of unemployment. We believe that the main attractor that helps maintain their strength is the project to produce their artwork. As professionals, their consumption practices and lifestyles are similar to those segments of the middle classes.

#### **c ) The fitness landscape of young visual artists.**

As complex adaptive systems they understand the market structure and the specificity and control over cultural matters. As stated above, they look at his surroundings for the media and information for their artistic project. They show their fitness in the environment to achieve their goals. There is a close relationship between their homeostasis and the feedback in learning and use of social networks, ICT's, blogs, etc. These are the means by which they appropriate the environment for their artistic goals. They make business networks contacting people with common interests through Internet. In blogs they can show their work being their primary tool to diffuse it. Social

networking is also used to disseminate their work. ICT 'S favor their collective work dynamics, generating a free exchange of information. There is learning, innovation and adaptation, achieving a functional balance in their work as creators.

In their living conditions subsystem, the social networks are also appropriated for leisure, for friendly relations. The boundary between personal and work issues is diffuse. There is not the clear separation of work and personal life that exists in other professions.

### Concluding Remarks

Identifying some of the mechanisms and resilient protective factors of young people, as well as successful adaptations and balancing measures during rough times is not enough to analyze the complexity of the resilient response. It is also very important to consider the emergence of new forms of social self-organization and relationships and the creation and appropriation of new social spaces.

In this paper the theoretical framework of complex adaptive dynamical systems, and the empirical work data from Gerber & Pinochet (2013) let us to identify organizational forms for resilient artistic activity of young people where there are fundamental patterns of social action based on feedback homeostatic dynamics as well as patterns of mutual cooperation for economic survival given the scarcity of resources. Self-management practices are essential in both patterns of action. The evolution and learning of the young artists system emerge from these two patterns. Their artwork projects are the articulating core of their social action patterns.

The internal self-regulation is essential to maintain their standard of living. Their strength is fueled by the artistic projects. For their patterns of professional feedback the dynamics of relationships with the arts is essential. There they find experiences, learning, knowledge, and a source of creativity, as well as the potential site for emerging artist collectives.

To adapt to this complex dynamics, it is essential mastering the market structures and the cultural environment in which they find themselves.

Finally we say that in no way the problem of the loss of social benefits that brings the youth labor deregulation is undervalued, but this paper focuses on the creative human impulse to survive adversity.

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