

The political positioning of young Catalan people.

An approximation in linguistic key

by Isaac Gonzàlez i Balletbó

Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the way in which young Catalan people speak and perceive politics, based on the main contributions of the piece of research called *Participation, politics and young people. An approximation to the political practices, social participation and political leanings of young Catalan people* (González, Collet and Sanmartín, 2007). We pay special attention to understanding the four *foldings* –symbolic, free time, rhetorical and ethical - that illustrate the direction of the political positioning of most young Catalan people. Finally, we observe what influence Catalan language has on the map of young people's political positioning.

Summary

1. Introduction
2. The political measures. The symbolic folding
3. Political activism. The free time folding
4. The perceptions of politics
5. The rethoriacal and ethical foldings
6. Young people's positioning in the political field
7. Catalan in young people's political positioning
8. Bibliography

1. Introduction

In this article, I propose to make a personal reflection on the recent publication of the piece of research called *Participation, politics and young people. An approximation to the political practices, social participation and political leanings of young Catalan people* (González, Collet and Sanmartín, 2007), of which I was the coordinator. In this piece of research, commissioned by the General Secretariat for Youth at the Institute of Governments and Public Policies, we analysed the way in which young Catalan people experienced and perceive politics. In the article, we look at the main contributions of this piece of research and later look at what effects language has on the political positioning of young people.

In order to achieve the objectives set, in the research we opted for the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methodological instruments. The backbone of the fieldwork was a telephone survey given to 3,300 young Catalan people aged between 15 and 29. Therefore, it is a very powerful survey with regards to the size of the sample. The large volume of interviews carried out enabled us to take on a detailed, rigorous analysis of the internal differences to be found among the various segments of young people. One of the differences which had a notable presence was that which referred to differences in the linguistic uses of young people, and especially to the habitual language used during their childhood.

From the statistical analysis carried out, we should highlight the significant presence the use of regression models had. This is a technique that enables us to observe the explanatory weight of the independent variables selected while neutralising the adulterated explanatory affects they have on each other.

At a methodological level, the survey was complemented by carrying out 21 discussion groups with young Catalan people aged 15 to 29. The perceptions and reflections of the young people had a fundamental role on interpreting the data from the survey. The discussion groups were held with young people of different social and demographic profiles,

meaning that we were able to cover a wide range of heterogeneous perceptions they have concerning politics according to the different positions in the social structure.

As its main thread, the article recovered the concept of *folding*. This is a theoretical concept we have created to synthesise the different logics of young people that we perceive from the different quantitative and qualitative empirical indices. By *folding* we understand the various appropriations that young people make of politics, reinterpreting their meaning. What can be considered to be politics and a political action is not something that can be taken for granted. Young people have redefined the semantic and practical barriers in such a way that the social uses of politics, the tangible and perceptible aspects in which it operates have undergone change. We will discuss this throughout the article.

2. The political measures. The symbolic folding

Nowadays, it is commonplace in media discourses as well as in those of most of the general public to consider the collective of young people as being particularly affected by political passivism, particularly in contrast with the young people of some decades ago. It is true that most young people are not noted for their high level of political activism, but this does not mean that it is a particularly passive collective. The data from the research shows how the level of young people's political activism, at least during the months when the fieldwork was being carried out, is notable for a certain effervescence at all levels. Around 85% of the young people surveyed who were in a position to be able to vote -in other words those who were not born abroad and those who in the last elections before the interview were over 18- declared that they had done so. The number of young people who, the year before the survey, had participated in some activity considered to be political vindication was also notable. Almost three quarters of the young people declared that they had done at least one political action. For example, 30.1% said they had participated in a demonstration. This data places young Catalan people at the forefront of European young people's political activism.

The previous data would enable us to make a self-satisfied reading about young Catalan people, however this is not our intention. In any case, it does enable us to qualify some of the more negative impressions of the relationship between young people and politics. Young Catalan people do not participate any less than adults, to the contrary, they seem to be the social collective with most people willing to participate, depending on the circumstances and forms of participation. However, the most interesting thing that comes from the analysis concerns the nature of this activism.

It is mainly characteristic by being *low-intensity* activism. There are many of them who have done some activity that could be considered to be political, however the great majority participate in one-off activities that require little commitment, little dedication and little personal exposure. Therefore it is a *light* commitment. This refers us to one of the elements with which we have characterised the way in which young people experience politics: its *symbolic folding*. Participation is something that is developed very sporadically, however it becomes an act with a great symbolic power in shaping one's own identity, as it makes the young person perceive him or herself as an active individual who "moves". We call this tendency *symbolic folding* precisely because the action becomes, above all, an act of affirming one's identity.

"Moving" or "not moving" from a political point of view places young people on the mental map of youths as few other things do. It becomes a key element in the construction of the identity of those who perceive themselves as committed, to however smaller degree, in practice, to this commitment. In addition, the young people who position themselves on the scale of those who "move, whether to a lesser or greater degree (and most of them do so to a lesser degree) do so based on determined parameters of the politics. On the whole, they shun the more institutional forms of participation -apart from going to vote- and on the other end of the scale, the more transgressive and anti-system ones. Violence and other vindictive excesses are badly considered by the immense majority of young people.

On the other hand, another key question is the influence of the political contingency of the moment on the level of young people's political participation. The survey was administered a few months after the general elections of 2004. Both the data concerning non-electoral political actions -above all demonstrations- as well as the high recognized electoral participation reflects the important mobilising influence that the opposition to certain policies

of the previous central government had in Catalonia. In the discussion groups carried out, the comments referring to reactive mobilisation against the participation of Spain in the Iraq war, the terrorist attacks of March 11th and how they were managed by the government were constant. The data of this survey shows how, in fact, we are facing a situation which created an extraordinary mobilisation.

On the other hand, the data concerning the electoral participation with regards to the referendum concerning the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia and the autonomous region and local elections there were later showed how the electoral mobilisation has not been consolidated. To the contrary, the levels of abstention grew to unprecedented levels. The effect would seem to be particularly pronounced among young people. The conclusion to be extracted is not that abstention among young people is very high; but that it is, in any case, a particularly fluctuating abstention. Increasingly fewer young people take their vote as an obligation, as a morally unavoidable obligation. On the other hand, voting is experienced as a right to be used in the case of situations that require a vote. This means that young people only exercise their vote when they consider that something is at stake and that their vote can involve a significant change. In this sense, it could be, as happened in 2004, that voting *against a party* has more ability to mobilise than voting *for a party*, above all in the face of the lack of trust and the disenchanted look that politics - understood in its most restricted sense - tends to awaken, in other words politics as a dispute between political parties to have the power to manage the resources and competencies of the state.

3. Political activism. The free time folding

In the previous part, we looked at the political participation of young people and interpreted its meaning. In the second part, we would like to look more in-depth at the analysis of the minority of politically more active young people. Around a third of young people could be considered to be "politically active" in the fact that their political actions are not strictly sporadic. However, we should bear in mind that, of this third, many of them do actions that involve a very low level of commitment; we have considered active young people to be all those who have been involved in more than four political actions. Therefore, not all those who are "politically active" are by any means intensely active. In fact, at the time of the interview, only 5.9% of young people participated in associations and organisations or groups of a political or vindictive nature -from political parties to squatters - and those who had done so at some time was 11%.

The type of participative involvement in political movements and associations of the more active young people is different to traditional political participation. In the first place, participation is often linked to a way of enjoying free time, which increasingly constitutes the identity of the subjects -we are what we do during the time in which we do not have to deal with obligations- meaning that young people's participation usually takes place in a free time or identity-making dimension. Along the same lines, matters that concern young people and mobilisation are increasingly related to matters concerning the labour world and the productive circle, in addition to the area of consumption and freedom in constructing their own lifestyle. Altogether, this is what we have called *free time folding*.

In second place, we have moved on from yesteryear's *militant activism* to the *impact activism* that characterises the involvement of today's young people. The difference between one and another kind of activism lies in the fact that in militant activism a large number of the active individuals did a certain *suspension of meaning* with regard to the actions that the institutions in which they were militants asked them to do, while today, young people do not understand their political participation if it is not by finding direct meaning in each of their actions. Although in the past, militants accepted becoming a cog in the political machinery, today's young people participate because what they do at each moment responds to objectives that they understand. Therefore, it is not surprising that a great number of the political actions should have an educational or spectacular dimension, both of which are destined to raising political awareness in the general public, or that they should be organised without giving up a certain free time element. At the same time, political action groups tend to be more informal, more flexible and even discontinuous and do not have the structuring energy that they had in the past. The motor of the meaning of political action lies in the individual and not in the organisation. One of the young people interviewed gave us the following example of political activism which exemplifies the characterisation we have just described:

Well I don't know. If the Catalonia Rally is supposed to come past, well we go and stand in the middle of the road with a poster. Doing things that, although illegal, won't cause you too many problems. But things that can make themselves heard and that fit in with your thoughts, well, then yes. And that have a certain impact, even though the words don't say much, that make people think... in that case, yes.

Jordi, 24 to 29 year-old discussion group, average-sized city

We could also add that very often the political participation of the minority of the more active young people is experienced as eminently youthful activism. Often reference groups are made up by only young people, and a large number of the active young people with whom we spoke recognize that this could only be maintained with difficulty once they started to take on the jobs or families that typically come with being an adult. Political activism is minority, but markedly youthful. It is part of a way of being young. The following statement given by one of the young people interviewed with a more activist profile reflects this.

I think that at our age we must make the most of our age because the things that we're doing now we won't be able to do in five years' time, when we find that we have to work or we won't eat. But at the same time you can't do now what you going to do later which is being very, very focused on your life because if not, everything goes to hell.

Adrià, 15 to 23 year-old discussion group, Barcelona

It could be that political activism is becoming a kind of youthful rite in the construction of a determined personal identity. Suffice to say that a good part of the more inactive young people see in this activism, rather than a rite of identity, a kind of *hidden curriculum* typical of people of a certain social status, among whom youthful activism is part of their future professional career. We will take up this reflection a little later on.

4. The perceptions of politics

So far we have looked at the matters concerning the objective participation of young people in politics. In this part, we look at the leading elements concerning the subjective impression that young people have about politics. We see what perceptions they have about politics, as well as their proximity or distance from it, cognitively as well as emotionally.

In general terms, politics does not awaken a feeling of positive adhesion. However, the reality is far removed from the caricature that illustrates young people as a group that does not care about politics. The information concerning the interest that politics awakens in them is that which reflects the position of young people most clearly. With regard to this, in the survey they were first asked the question concerning the interest that politics in general aroused in them. Most young people replied that politics interests them little (39%) or not at all (18.1%). Nevertheless, more than 4 out of every 10 young people said that politics interested them quite a bit or a lot. Afterwards, they were asked if they were interested in politics understood as being what happens in social and political areas on a local, Catalan, Spanish, European and worldwide scale. In these questions, the number of young people who replied that they were fairly or very interested fluctuated between 60% (European area) and 85% (Catalonia). The interest in politics shoots up if it is not considered in the more restricted meaning of the concept.

Based on the variables referring to the self-perceived competence to understand politics, the frequency with which it is talked about, and the interest in politics, we designed four categories of profiles of young people that summarise their different ways of being closer or further removed from politics: Young people who felt *close* (21%), *far removed* (39.3%), *those who talk about it* (17.4%) and those who are *disenchanted* (22.4%). The *young people who feel close* are those who habitually talk about politics, they feel competent and they show interest in it. Suffice to say that among these young people, a significant part of them have critical reviews of institutional politics, however close it may seem to them. The young people who feel *distant* are those who are most differentiated from those who feel *close*. They do not talk about politics, they do not feel competent and they are not interested in politics. Suffice to say that part of these young people are interested in what is going on at the social and political level in their environment (particularly on a local and Catalan scale). Young people *who talk about it* are those who show some emotional proximity to politics, but

a cognitive distance. They talk about politics, they may find it interesting or relevant, but on the other hand they do not feel very competent. Young *disenchanted* people are characterised by being the complete opposite. They show cognitive proximity but emotional distance.

The previous paragraphs only aim to reflect on the complex nature of the position of young people towards politics. Beyond this heterogeneity, we can detect transversal elements that are typical of young people. These include, in the first place, the strong disrepute of politics. Most young people distance themselves from politics understood in a restricted sense, even if they show interest or knowledge or are politically active. Their disrepute or dislike is shown in different ways, which can even be opposing ones. It can be crystallised in the strictest political passivism or in forms of anti-system activism, and it can be justified through preparing varied ideological discourses, in the consideration of policies as something typical of the world of adults -a perception of some adolescents of a lower social status- or by means of more radical Manichaeist oppositions.

5. The rhetorical and ethical foldings

Apart from dislike as a common characteristic, there are two more foldings that enable two tendencies to be perceived on the reinterpretation that is made of politics based on this shared dislike. Suffice to say that they are tendencies that operate, above all, among the main bulk of young people, but not among all of them. Neither the minority of youths who are far removed from politics, or the minority of youths who are more committed see themselves affected by these foldings, which we have called *rhetorical folding* and *ethical folding*.

By rhetorical folding, we understand the tendency that the scepticism with which politics and politicians are viewed does not lead to complete distancing, but to the reduction of the field of political action of informal debates and discussions. Young people with the rhetorical folding are those who talk about politics, who understand it, but who limit their political action to debates with their friends and informal criticism. Among young people, this rhetorical folding could even be considered to be a kind of transforming action; and in others, a necessary way of letting off steam.

To the contrary, the ethical folding is that which transfers political action to the terrain of small everyday actions. Whether through lack of knowledge of the political field, whether through being disenchanted, the conceptualisation that is made of political action refers to the idea of think globally, act locally. The ethical leading of their everyday life is seen as the best way of achieving a global transforming action.

6. Young people's positioning in the political field

So far, we have gone over the main contributions referring to the political actions and perceptions of young Catalan people. We have seen how politics is re-conceptualised among young people by means of four foldings: a) the symbolic folding, which makes low intensity political activism -that which a good part of young people do- into a language in their identity-making self-positioning as a young person and as an individual; b) the free time folding, which relocates the times, the space and the objects of politics among the main part of the minority of young political activists; c) the rhetorical folding, which confines politics in a more restricted sense to a matter for debate and discussion from a sceptical and disenchanted distancing; and d) the ethical folding, that re-situates the field in which political action is possible in the terrain of everyday ethically correct behaviour. Beyond these foldings, there is also a considerable group of young people who are situated in the strictest dislike and political passivism.

The approximation we have made to the political field, through this analysis, is more interpretive than descriptive. Rather than finding and x-raying different kinds of young people, we wanted to approximate ourselves to the deep transformations that the political field is suffering, from the point of view of the perceptions and actions of young people.

The approximation we have made to the political field, through this analysis, is more interpretive than descriptive. Rather than finding and x-raying different kinds of young

people, we wanted to approximate ourselves to the deep transformations that the political field is suffering, from the point of view of the perceptions and actions of young people.

In this part, we would like to make this approximation more descriptive. We would like to get closer to a youthful classification that situates the different groups of young people that we can find according to their positioning in the political field, as has been done in the research that inspired this article. In the piece of research, we drew up a map of the positions of young people in participation and politics through an *analysis of correspondences*. The different variables considered to make the map of positionings was a) Intensity and kind of non-electoral political action; b) Political leaning; c) Interest in what is going on in the social and political aspects in various territorial areas; d) Ethical habits; e) Electoral practice; f) Perception of effectiveness of different political practices; g) Positioning on the ideological axis; h) Positioning on the national assignation axis; i) Current participation in organisations, groups and associations.

On the resulting map of positions we can situate seven categories of young people. It is the classification of synthesis on young people's positions in the political field. The level of differentiation of some of the kinds between each other -especially the intermediate ones- is rather low, and this is an initial consideration to be made. *Type 1* - we decided not to give labels to each kind so as not to give rise to an excessively forced characterisation - of young people (11.2%) is differentiated by being particularly active and close to politics - although not necessarily any less critical about the policies. This is a transversal characteristic which is expressed with different clarifications, and *Type 2* (17.7%) shows an average level of activity and proximity. *Type 3* (14,7%) and *Type 4* (20%) are characterised by showing a considerably lower proximity and activism - one-off events, partial proximity to politics - and the other three kinds show a far greater distancing from politics, which seems to derive in a radical distancing and with symbolical-ideological connotations of resistance in *Type 6* (13.4%), and on the other hand in the distancing through lack of cognitive attitude in *Type 7* (10.6%) - which is where we find a highly notable proportion of young people of foreign origin.

Table 1. Young people's positioning in the political field. Percentages, Catalonia, 2005

	%
Type 1	11,2%
Type 2	17,7%
Type 3	14,7%
Type 4	20,0%
Type 5	12,5%
Type 6	13,4%
Type 7	10,6%
Total	100%

Source: Participation, politics and young people. (González, Collet and Sanmartín, 2007)

On the other hand, the distribution in the social structure of young people's positions and dispositions towards politics is not fair. In general terms, we find that a higher level of status through family assignation (found above all through the level of education of the parents) and/or through personal acquisition (higher level of studies, more prestigious profession) correlates with a closer attitude to politics (also to institutional politics), both in its objective aspects (political actions) and its subjective ones. In addition, the correlation is accumulative, in fact the better the social position of the individual through the different variables, the easier it will be that they should have attitudes of proximity to politics - not necessarily of sympathy towards institutional politics.

Table 2. Young people's positioning in the political field according to the educational capital of their parents

Type of positioning	Educational capital of their parents			Total
	Neither of the parents with post-compulsory education	At least one parent with post-compulsory education	At least one parent with a university qualification	
Type 1	15,0	33,9	51,1	100%
Type 2	28,2	39,1	32,7	100%
Type 3	30,3	34,6	35,1	100%
Type 4	35,8	42,4	21,8	100%
Type 5	48,4	36,1	15,4	100%
Type 6	52,7	32,5	14,8	100%
Type 7	34,0	33,0	33,0	100%
Total	34,7	36,7	28,6	100%

Source: Participation, politics and young people. (González, Collet and Sanmartín, 2007)

Despite this, the undeniable correlation between status and political leaning tends to hide the fact that close young people (those of *Type 1*) are a minority and, even more, they are also a minority among young people of greater social status. Thus, the majority of young people of *Type 1* have studied or are studying at university, and have parents who studied at university. However the immense majority of young people who study at university and/or have parents who studied there, are not found in *Type 1*. We could make the same reflection about the kind of young people who are more radically opposed. Most young people, whatever their structural position, are found in intermediate positions, in the types that are objectively not very differentiated.

On the other hand, the differences operate in a very intense way at two levels. On the one hand, the more extreme minorities clearly correlate with positions of very different statuses, in such a way that their extreme, and therefore particularly visible situation, "contaminates" the subjective perception of young people, who tend to a certain Manichaistic dichotomisation. Young people who perceive themselves as being "committed" tend to be in situations of privileged social status, and identify young people who do not care about politics as those who are most different from them due to their existential attitude. Therefore, for example, they characterise young people who do not care as those who start to work younger because they want to earn money as early as possible, or those who only have one objective in life, which is to make every weekend into a long party. On the other hand, young people in positions of lower social status tend to see young people in more privileged situations as those who commit themselves to political matters, although this recognition is not always interpreted as an altruistic dedication of no personal interest.

This dichotomous illustration, which concerns the over-viewing of extreme types of young people, correlates with actions of low intensity which we have called the *symbolic folding*. The symbolic folding, as we have already said, operates on a perceptive dimension that divides the mental map of young people into those who do not care about anything and those who do. It is a division that is related to the structural plan and tends to position young people according to their status. Suffice to say however, that the situation is not one of an extreme dual position, for the simple reason that a good number of young people cannot feel unmistakably identified with positions of high or low status, but are found in intermediate situations. In any case, it is interesting how this youthful dual nature tends to be interpreted in terms of ideological positioning by the young people who perceive themselves as being politically active (the *symbolical folding*), while young people who are more distant from politics tend to interpret more in terms of the position within the social structure. The former tend to fall into certain individualising reductionism (at the same time, mentioning that young people are divided into those who commit themselves or those who do not care, depending on personal decisions), and the latter into environmental reductionism (they tend to interpret that young people are interested in politics and participation or not depending on the world in which they move, who their parents are and whether they have studied or not).

As we mentioned in the previous paragraph, the different foldings are not independent from the structural position of people. We saw how the *symbolic folding*, despite showing practices that are not very different, affects most of the young population who perceive themselves as being committed and to differentiate themselves from those who do not care.

A very significant part of young university students activate this folding, which correlates with the other structural positions which refer to more favoured existential situations. To a great degree, we can identify this folding with *Type 2* of the synthesis category (although also with *Type 3*, *Type 4*, and even with *Type 5*).

Young people affected by the *free time folding* are a good part of the most politically active minority of young people. They are young people who we can identify with *Type 1* of the category of synthesis (the most active and committed), and as in the previous case, we tend to find them among young people with more favourable social positions. In addition, they are usually young people who identify themselves, on the axis of ideological assignation, as left-right wing and of national assignation, with the categories *being extreme left-wing*, or *being a citizen of the world*.

As far as the *rhetorical folding* is concerned, it refers to a kind of political disenchantment which, although it also correlates with positions of more privileged status, does so with less strength than the two previous foldings. The *rhetorical folding* is more present in young people who have gone through or are still studying at university. It is an informed folding, which affects young people who have politics as a subject of conversation - and for many young university students this is what it is. However it is also characterised by being a more masculine and feminine folding, more typical of slightly older young people and found more often in large cities -in particular Barcelona.

On the other hand, the *ethical folding* is more easily identifiable in small towns and in girls. We should remember that by ethical folding we understand a greater concern for the active incidence on small everyday matters with which individuals consider that they are adding their small grain of sand to transforming the world. The kind of attitude that involves tuning in better with some characteristics of the traditional female *habitus* -that remains as an unconscious substratum in current ways of being, which does not happen with male ones; this is why in the rhetorical and ethical foldings we find one of the main historic reminiscences of gender inequality. The assessment of invisible, everyday work refers to the private and domestic sphere, while a discursive statement clearly fits in with the traditional public presence reserved for men. Another area in which we detect this differential distribution due to gender reasons that have resonance on the traditional organisation of life in the *public-male world* and *private-female world* can be found in the taking on of political responsibilities among the minority of most politically active young people. It is true that there is not a great difference in the percentage of boys and girls who belong to political activism groups. However, beyond this apparent homogeneity -which also reveals the growing equality between the sexes-while girls tend to take on more invisible tasks, organisation or internal management, boys tend more to take on tasks of public representation of the institutions and organisations in which they are militant.

7. Catalan in young people's political positioning

In the tendency of young people to position themselves in groups that are close or more further removed from politics, there is a set of variables that have a powerful explanatory weight. These are the variables that refer to the intensity of the subjects' *feeling Catalan* traits.

By "feeling Catalan", we understand all the variables that concern shared objective elements that favour individuals perceiving themselves and being perceived by others as an integrant of something as controversial as "being Catalan". In the setting of our piece of research, there are two anchors: the language spoken during infancy and the personal and family origin of the young people (Catalonia, the rest of Spain or abroad). "Feeling Catalan" is shown by the preferential use of Catalan during their childhood, and the young person and/or their parents having been born in Catalonia; in other words, the linguistic and family roots in Catalonia. This is an appropriation of the concept of being Catalan to which we gave an eminently analytical meaning.

Therefore, we would like to warn people that this is a *sui generis* use of *being Catalan* concept, that has nothing to do with the political or regulatory considerations about what could be considered to be the typical uses of being Catalan and what not, beyond the Catalan language. In this sense, we avoid falling into the demarcation of being Catalan based on other cultural, folkloric and artistic uses. Sure enough, there are cultural uses that are more

easily identifiable as being Catalan -and identified by most of the population- however in our opinion they are not operational markers of being Catalan. At a social level, one can be considered as being Catalan or not by the general public -and by oneself- according to one's linguistic uses, but not according to whether one dances *sardanes* (a traditional Catalan dance) or not. Therefore, we do not consider these uses to be "feeling Catalan" not just because of their difficult analytical operationality, but also because of the conceptual considerations.

Neither do we understand by "feeling Catalan" the feeling of perceived assignment, because what we want to perceive are the elements assigned to an individual that places him or her in a position of the social structure that does not depend upon them, but on those who are ascribed beyond their own desire. Linguistic uses in childhood or the origin of the young person or the family do not depend on subjective decisions, therefore they are anchors. However, being Catalan goes beyond these objective anchors, in such a way that people can perceive themselves and be perceived as representatives of being Catalan in a way that goes beyond their origin or language of their childhood, whether due to the language they later use, or for the subjective perception they have of their national and cultural assignation.

In any case, we use the idea of anchoring because we have observed that the language used in childhood and the origin explain different political positions among young people. The feeling of being Catalan explains the differences in the political practices and perceptions of young people as much or even more than their social status. Therefore, although in the previous part we said, with regard to their variables, that they refer to social status, this also works in the same way with regard to the variables that anchor subjects into feeling Catalan. The greater the level of anchorage, the more possibilities there are that young people are more closely involved in politics. The main interest of this lies in the fact that part of this influence is independent of social status, measured above all on the academic level of families and their young people, and on their work position. In other words, although feeling Catalan correlates with status in explaining positions in the political field of young people, part of the influence of the variables of anchorage are not owed to this correlation. It is something that analysis based on models of regression enables to be shown.

The level of education is certainly an indirect and mistaken level of social status. Social status depends on other variables such as those related to social class (family capital and income, type of employment, etc.). In this sense, it is possible that behind the variables relating to feeling Catalan there are matters concerning social status that the variables concerning the level of education do not manage to deal with.

However, we believe that the overwhelming maze of the results is sufficient to make it clear that not everything behind the political positioning of young people is status. There are other structural questions that explain these positionings. In this sense, we would venture to say that the bulk of the variables concerning the political positions that we have analysed in the piece of research are signs of a structuring axis of the social position of individuals: the *social centrality* that operates as a second organising axis of the social structure. Our interpretation is that the variables of feeling Catalan refer in a very clear way to this second structuring axis of the positions on the social structure, that which situates subjects in more central or more peripheral positions of the social structure.

By social centrality, we understand the ability to immediately and without reflection understand the different institutional settings that make up the relational, organisational and communicative fabric that gives collective life sense beyond the group of people with whom we maintain face-to-face relationships. Therefore, centrality conditions the ability to decode and understand, first, and then to feel as one's own, the different social and political frameworks in which the individual moves. "Feel as their own" implies being able to be criticised or expressly distancing, not just adhering acritically.

The fact is that the concept of positional centrality is controversial, because it is difficult to make out what the "relational, organisational and communication fabric" is, which, if shared, gives meaning to collective life. In fact, one of the characteristics of the modern world is to unravel this institutional reference framework shared by all individuals. However, we believe that there is a bulk of institutions -formal and informal- and social norms -implicit and explicit-that mark off the bulk of shared *things that are taken for granted* that facilitate social life with strangers and the everyday orientation of individuals in all non-habitual situations thanks to the predetermined types of the action.

In fact, our interpretation is, as we said before, that not completely distancing oneself from politics is one of the best indicators of this central or peripheral positioning in the social fabric. Therefore, distancing oneself from politics is the indicator of something far more basic: the distancing from the institutional framework in a more generic sense. Here we should remember that we understand distancing in a deep sense, as the inability to recognize and identify anything that refers to the concept of "politics". This is something that affects a minority of the young people, in this radical sense.

"Feeling Catalan" is not the only element that favours centrality or periphery in individual people's social position. In fact, the variables of social status can also be interpreted as indicative of greater or lesser social centrality, as they only refer to different hierarchical positions in the social structure. As far as hierarchical indicators are concerned, the variables of social status tell us about the unequally distributed possibilities for enjoying the possibilities of material enjoyment or for occupying places of social relevance at different levels (this would be the axis of vertical ordering of the social structure). At the same time, however, the variables of social status are also indicative of the greater possibilities of individuals to be in central or peripheral social positions, in view of the fact that the better they are situated in the social hierarchy, the easier it is to develop these abilities to recognize the different significant social environments. The vertical axis (unequal distribution of the possibilities of material enjoyment) and the horizontal axis (what I have called *social centrality*) are usually associated in individuals, as the distribution of cognitive resources and of resources to enjoy and position oneself socially usually come from the very same institutions and socialisation processes. They are, however, differentiated analytical axes which, as we see, have autonomous behaviour.

Therefore, "feeling Catalan" is also indicative of greater or lesser centrality. and they are so with as much or even more exclamatory capacity than the variables of social status. In fact, at an explanatory level, it often appears as being more influential than social status. In the regression models, both spoken language as well as origin systematically showed the same thing. Both those people who spoke more in Catalan during their childhood as well as young people born in Catalonia as children of parents born in Catalonia tend to be more participative and closer to politics. Our interpretation is that by being deeply rooted in the relational networks and the recognition of institutional environments -both those referring to social organisations as well as everyday relational frameworks -as references in their own right explained this greater tendency to social centrality of young people anchored in being Catalan. Both the origin as well as the language becomes central elements in the facility for recognizing and positioning in institutional environments and therefore, in the positioning within the political field -despite being affected by one or more of the foldings mentioned.

In addition, young people tend to identify the correlation between political positioning and feeling Catalan more easily than between political positioning and social status. In short, for the young people who are most opposed it is just as easy or even more so to identify politically committed young people as "Catalinos" (Catalan speakers of Catalan origin) than young people from privileged positions (we can find other references to this in the article by Roger Martínez in this same monograph). In addition, despite the fact that the influence of both elements can be considered as independent, and we have already shown how there is an *accumulative influence*, as feeling Catalan and the positioning in positions of privileged status tend to correlate.

Table 3. Positioning of young people in the political field according to the habitual language spoken during childhood.

Type of positioning	Language habitually spoken during childhood				
	Catalan	Spanish	Both	Others	Total
Type 1	48,4	22,0	21,7	7,9	100%
Type 2	57,5	17,3	24,5	0,7	100%
Type 3	26,1	47,7	19,7	6,4	100%
Type 4	48,8	28,6	22,3	0,3	100%
Type 5	29,1	43,4	26,5	1,0	100%
Type 6	7,6	67,7	14,1	10,6	100%
Type 7	2,7	50,9	2,1	44,3	100%
Total	34,3	38,0	19,6	8,1	100%

Source: Participation, politics and young people. (González, Collet and Sanmartín, 2007)

The explanatory collinear nature that exists between the variable of origin, that refers to the "objective", material position of assignation of individuals in relational networks is especially interesting in that it shows, *grosso modo*, up to what point their insertion into them is recent or deeply rooted, or is only rooted by the cultural facility to insert oneself in it, and the linguistics, which tells us about the social uses of individuals, therefore, to a *super-structural* cultural assignation. One of the doors that the piece of research leaves open is that of looking more deeply, beyond the general collinear nature, into what happens in these individuals in which one or another position are not parallel. We refer to those individuals whose families are rooted in Catalonia but who are Spanish speakers, or to individuals who are relative newcomers but Catalan speakers, whether they were in their childhood or later. It would also be interesting to cover the situation of people who, not originating from Catalan speaking environments, acquire Catalan as a habitual language during their youth; in other words, those who "anchor themselves to feeling Catalan" through linguistic practice after their childhood.

This analysis would enable us to deal with a vitally important question: up to what point does Catalan become a *cultural barrier* to the identification with politics and more generically, in the social and institutional environments of Catalonia, or whether it is a *cultural shortcut* in this identification. Language can become, at a symbolic level, a *cultural artefact* that encysts individuals in situations of removing their roots and lack of recognition of their own social and political protagonism in the Catalan environment, and by extension in the entire social and political environment, or to the contrary, it can facilitate the transition to such a rooting and recognition, accelerating what Salvador Cardús calls *solution of the condition of being an immigrant* (Cardús, 2005).

Catalan could possibly generate either one or the other affect. In fact, depending on which statements of resistance towards the institutions, they would seem to state themselves with particular firmness among young Catalan people, born in Catalonia, but Spanish-speaking and with a low family and job status. They are young people who fit into *Type 6 of the synthesis classification*. In these cases -and also in part of the young Spanish speaking people not affected by this complete opposition, but by the *rhetorical folding*- that which is seen as the discredited political environment often goes beyond political parties and the administration. By identifying proximity, any political statement "contaminates" this dislike, even the anti-institutional and critical ones - many of them led by young Catalan speakers in situations of status that are not unfavourable belonging to *Type 1*- and also Catalan language, a cultural artefact with which this far reaching world of what is political, what is institutional, what is politically correct expresses itself sometimes, despite the appearance of radical nature. In the subjective perception of determined young people everything is part of the same institutional conglomeration against which they rebel or show reactive hostility.

As a cultural artefact, language is the object of emotional adhesions and other actions. This depends, to a great degree, on the kind of *associative resonance* of the artefact; in our case, Catalan. Catalan has different political resonance. Among a large part of young Catalan people who are more politically minded, Catalan is the object of political defence. For these young people, the language of the administration is that of the central state: Spanish. For many other young people, on the other hand, neither Catalan or Spanish are the object of explicit political defence. For Catalan speakers, on the whole Catalan does not resound as an institutional language, however for many Spanish speakers of Catalan origin it does resound like an institutional language, and therefore it is usually associated with negative connotations that the world has about what the institutional world involves, conventions imposed by the structures of power of which they are notably hostile. Suffice to say that at this initial moment, the negative resonance of Catalan does not have so much to do with that they are identified with the world of politics, but with their identification, during childhood and adolescence, with the more generic area of formal institutions: school, local administration and with the conventional world. To a great degree, adolescence is culturally constructed in opposition to everything that smacks of convention and formality - the study by González, Alegre and Benito, on advertising aimed at children, adolescents and young people is a good example of this (2006) - and Catalan can be associated to it. The quote of a young female university student from a Spanish-speaking working class district shows this symbolic role that Catalan plays:

I have differentiated a great deal between university friends and friends from my district (...) but you have to ... our district is ... more than immigrants, it is a district that ... we are the only people who speak Catalan and we are called "posers" because we go to university; that says it all ... I say to one of my friends in the district that I'm going to the theatre and they laugh at me I can't tell any of my friends that I've got to go and see a play or that we're going to a museum ... and that doesn't mean that every time I go with my friends from here [the University] I go to see a museum ...

Cecília, a Catalan University student

In many cases however, the resonance is underlying, it does not crystallise in ideologies of linguistic hostility. Among a large number of Spanish-speaking adolescents, in particular those who do not live on an everyday basis with Catalan speaking adolescents, Catalan is the language that tends to generate a certain rejection because of the underlying associations they make of it, but they are preconscious associations. In the passage from adolescence to youth, and later to adulthood, this resonance can be consolidated in ideologies of resistance, dissolve themselves and even invert their tone. Adolescent linguistic adhesions, often reinforced by consumer and leisure time areas in Spanish, are not irreversible. The passage to the world of work, to university or to having children often involves contextual changes that can generate emotional reversibility or ideological consolidation.

In the case of the University, it is particularly interesting in the framework of this article, because it enables us to speak of experiences narrated in the discussion groups. University is, for many young Spanish-speaking people, the first context in which they have habitual horizontal contact with a high percentage group of individuals who speak Catalan. We interviewed young people in whom this contact has neutralised the negative resonance of Catalan (or consolidated positive minority resonance in their childhood environments), and others, on the other hand, in whom they have crystallised into a discourse of linguistic resistance. The two following quotes, from two female university students from Spanish-speaking environments, exemplified these two trends that are generated by immersion into an environment, the University, (perceived as being) mainly Catalan speaking.

[Since I have been studying at University] I have noticed it ... I know it is I am much more left wing and much more "Catalan", much more ... (...) In my neighbourhood, there are immigrants from Spain but they are not Catalan and this is very noticeable (...) I have always loved Catalonia and have tended towards Catalan nationalism, but since I came here, even more. And they stay neutral, or towards the other side, more *fascist*... And not just with matters concerning Catalonia, also with immigration ... I think I'm more tolerant, I don't know why, I don't know if this is because I've got more information or because I have other values (...)

Cecilia, a Catalan university student

Before I came to university I didn't believe in politics. Later, I was like analysing what was worthwhile, I listened but I didn't say anything. I think many people say "this happens, and ..." for example to do with Catalan, or to do with the police. I don't speak Catalan because I'm from Hospitalet and for a thousand reasons. And here, lots of people say to you "why don't you speak Catalan, and this, that and the other". And it's the same with the police. My boyfriend is a policeman and here everybody criticises the police by generalising and saying really ridiculous things! People say that we shouldn't generalise, but everyone generalises. I don't put myself in a clear position, because it depends ... (...). I'm rather lost, aren't I? What should I do? Because in one day as many as seven people have said to me, in different situations "Why don't you speak Catalan?" But it's the first thing they say to me. "What's your name?" "Miriam" "Why don't you speak Catalan?" Because I don't want to, and that's it. Not because I don't like it, but because I don't feel like it, because I don't want to, end of story. I don't know, all this has made me think that people protest a lot, but in the end they do the same, you know? Therefore in the end I think "yes, yes, you can say what you like, and I'm going to carry on thinking what I want".

Miriam, a Catalan university student

Catalan can become a language of prestige, that is taken on as one's own in that they abandon the most anti-institutional positions that are typical of youths, or it can become the

main cultural marker of all young people who, behind the appearance of political radicalness, form part of the privileged social groups from which you want to be differentiated.

To a great degree, the personal experience of each individual means that the balance goes in one direction or another, and that the language therefore, becomes neutralised or not, as a statement of that towards which the bulk of young people show hostility. the world of institutional politics.

8. Bibliography

- ANDUIZA, E.; BOSCH, A. (2004). *Comportamiento político y electoral*, Barcelona, Ariel.
- BARBERÀ, O.; BARRIO, A.; RODRÍGUEZ, J. (2002). *Els militants de les organitzacions polítiques juvenils a Catalunya*, Barcelona, Diputació de Barcelona.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1988). *La distinción*, Taurus, Madrid.
- BENDIT, R. (2000). «La participación social y política de los jóvenes en los países de la UE», a S. Balardini (ed). *La participación social y política de los jóvenes en el nuevo siglo*, Buenos Aires, CLACSO.
- BENEDICTO, J.; MORÁN, M. L. (2005). *Aprendiendo a ser ciudadanos. Experiencias sociales y construcciones de la ciudadanía entre los jóvenes*, Madrid, INJUVE.
- BERGER, P.; LUCKMANN, T. (1988). *La construcción social de la realidad*, Barcelona, Herder.
- CARDUS, S (ed). (2005) *Els terrassencs del s.XX. Immigració, identitat i canvi*. Barcelona, Lunwerg edituorsi Diari de Terrassa.
- DIVERSE AUTHORS (2002). *Joves i valors. Els joves catalans en l'enquesta europea de valors*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- ESTRUCH, J.; CARDÚS, S. (1984). *Les enquestes a la joventut de Catalunya*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- FONT, J. (2002). «Els joves i la política: i si no fossin tan diferents?», a Diversos autors (ed). *Joves i valors. Els joves catalans en l'enquesta europea de valors*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- FUNDACIÓ FERRER I GUÀRDIA (1999). *Joves i participació a Catalunya*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- FURLONG, A.; CARTMEL, F. (2001). *Els contextos canviants de la joventut*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- GONZÀLEZ, I.; COLLET, J.; SANMARTIN, J. (2007). *Participació, política i joves. Una aproximació a les pràctiques polítiques, la participació social i l'afecció política de la joventut catalana*.
- INGLEHART, R. (1991). *El cambio cultural en las sociedades avanzadas*, Madrid, CIS-Siglo XXI.
- LIPOVETSKY, G. (1992). *El crepúsculo del deber*, Barcelona, Anagrama.
- MARTÍNEZ, R.; GONZÁLEZ, I.; DE MIGUEL, A. (2005). *Cultura i joves*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.
- MEGÍAS, E. (coord). (2006). *Jóvenes y política: el compromiso con lo colectivo*, Madrid, INJUVE.
- PRIETO, R. (1999). *Tendencias del asociacionismo juvenil en los 90*, Madrid, INJUVE.
- PUTNAM, R. (1993). *Per a fer que la democràcia funcioni*. Barcelona, Proa.
- PUTNAM, R. (2001). *Solo en la bolera. Colapso y resurgimiento de la comunidad norteamericana*, Galaxia, Vigo.
- SERRACANT, P. (2001). *Viure al dia. Condicions d'existència, comportaments i actituds dels joves catalans*, Barcelona, Secretaria General de Joventut.

Publications on Internet

DIVERSE AUTHORS (2005). «Propostes sobre la participació estudiantil a les universitats». Proposal and conferences in the Congress on student participation in universities organised by

http://www10.gencat.net/dursi/generados/catala/universitats/recurs/doc/jornada_mferrer.pdf)

GONZÁLEZ, I.; ALEGRE, M. A.; BENITO, R. (2006). *De nens exigents i joves lliures. El corpus normatiu subjacent en la narrativitat publicitària.* (<http://www.audiovisualcat.net/recerca/nensijoves.pdf>)

Isaac González i Balletbó
Institut de Govern i Polítiques Públiques (IGOP)
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
igonzalezbal@uoc.edu