

# School and work: elements to discuss youth in Brazil

## Abstract

Brazil is living a demographic bonus. Considering the relationship between school and work, the biggest challenge posed by the demographic youth bonus consists in better qualifying such a group of youth and articulating this qualification with employment policies that can support development cycles in the next decades, in a country that walks to a fast process of population ageing. Based on a synthetic dataset of national scope, this paper presents a brief picture of the main education and work policies developed in Brazil in the last fifteen years. Finally, it exposes the impasses around such policies, as well as the main challenges that await us from now on.

**Keywords:** youth, school, work transition, public, policies, Brazil

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## Introduction

### Being young in Brazil

Brazil has just over 200 million inhabitants, from which 50 million are juveniles aged 15-29.<sup>1</sup> However, this “youth wave” begins to decrease and, according to demographic projections, this share of the population should decline very fast after 2025, amounting to less than 35 million youth in 2050. From the point of view of the relationship between school and work, the biggest challenge posed by the demographic youth bonus consists in better grading such a differentiated contingent of youth and articulating it with employment policies that can support development cycles in the next decades, in a country that walks to an accelerated process of populational ageing.

Among South American countries, Brazil has the biggest youth population: fifty million! From these, around 25 million are employed and 6 million are looking for a job. Nonetheless, exclusive dedication to education is practised by just a quarter of the young population. Based on a multidimensional approach that considers a more general set of events in the life path of those individuals, such data confirms that working always had a present and important dimension in the lives of most of Brazilian youths.<sup>1,2</sup> From this perspective, working has been exerted by the youth, specially by the poor, by means of multiple combinations of study, family life and sociability. Differently from many countries, this articulation and primarily the insertion in the world of labour have been propitiating to a significant portion of the Brazilian youth the enjoyment of being young. Brazil has, as its most noticeable characteristics, continental dimensions and historical social asymmetry. This leads to the fact that the juvenile condition in the country is experienced in ways that are not only different, but also

profoundly unequal. They are significantly disparate, when comparing the trajectory of urban with rural youth, middle and upper class with the popular groups, black people with white people, as well as young females with young males.

Between 2005 and 2015, youth struggled to find support in the federal government. During the first government of president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2006), this closer approximation with the organized youth collective's claiming was conjoined for the construction of policies and legal landmarks that sought to tackle those inequalities in a new understanding of youth. In this new design, the juvenile is a protagonist, that is, they have rights intrinsic to their condition of being young and it is the duty of the State to give support to their trajectories in the form of public policies without, however, tutoring or considering them as mere recipients of such policies. Still in 2005, a vigorous cycle of youth's public policies started, mainly by the creation of the National Youth Secretary (SNJ); the National Counsel for the Youth (Conjuve), that reunited juvenile collectives monitoring policies for the youth; and by many programs and policies that sought to assert the participation of the youth as a structuring axis for the planning and implementation of those actions. Due to the greater national articulation, the force and the change of perspective adopted, it is possible to characterize this period as an inclusive cycle for the Brazilian youth. At this period, the search for autonomy and emancipation was in the centre of youth's demands. It had, as a result, an effective expansion of the field of possibilities<sup>3</sup> of young Brazilians, especially in the educational sphere, more than in work, as we will see ahead.

Considering the expansion of new social conditions that has marked the life trajectory of Brazilian youth in the last fifteen years, as the significant expansion of the access to education and the incorporation of this age segment as a subject of rights in the legislation and in the public policies, we should ask: who are the youths in Brazil today? What means to be young in a globalized economy that points to a restrictive and mutant world of work, pervaded by fast technological changes and with a circulation of information humankind has never seen before? How the various youth's segments have been articulating education and work? Which policies are required by the youths that live in a reality full of uncertainties?

<sup>1</sup>In Brazil, according to the law that establish the Youth Statute—Law 12.852, enacted on the fifth of august, 2013—youth, regarding the obligations of the State, are the individuals aged between 15 and 29 years old. The Brazilian age pyramid inform us that in 2017 the biggest populational concentration (over 50%) was in the age range between 0 to 34 years.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>In Brazil, as it is with other Latin American countries, the relation school-work has been strongly marked by an insertion in the labour activities before the legal age. The recent achievements relating to the prohibition of child labour and the promotion of guarantees to the children and youngsters are quite recent, only gaining strength after the constitution of 1988.

## Juvenile condition the relationship between education and work

In this view, it is possible to assert that we learn little if we look at the Brazilian youth as a group of people exposed to linear situations or by the idea of actors performing trajectories as successive stages. In view of the data presented, we observe the arising of new lines of comprehension that might be able to capture movements instead of static positions. The data reveals that it is important to think about public policies for the youth considering that youth are strategic actors for the development of a country and strong protagonists of rights IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), especially the PNAD (National Household Sample Survey) dates from 2015 shows that the trends described above are confirmed. The youngest generations (15 to 17 years old) express the effects of our recent educational advances. They work less and study more. As well, an important legislation protecting poor families to support children and youth growing has an important role in this matter. Between us, on each age segment, study and work have different importance. From 18 years on, working becomes extremely relevant. But, unfortunately, it does not mean the conclusion of the basic education.

Data concerning youngsters that neither study nor work is another issue that deserve emphasis. An important part of it is constituted by young women who conciliate work and / or study with family responsibilities (baby care, young brothers, elderly etc.) As we see, the indicator proves to be an important monitor of vulnerabilities. In general, we observe that the youths show a non-linear trajectory between school and work, returning and moving away from both institutions in a recursive way. Among young women, the status of responsible for the family and domestic tasks seems to be more linear and established and cannot be postponed. This data allows us to deduce that, for poor youngsters, education project can be postponed, for both women and men. However, regarding women, work is even more postponed. According to the National Youth Secretariat's research, Brazil Youth Agenda (SNJ, 2013), in educational process, there are two critical situations for the poor youth.

The first situation is faced with ending each educational level, making it easier to evade the school system. The second situation occurs when school and work are aggregated, and, in this case, the highest vulnerability happens when youth accumulate low education and the labour insertion marked by employ turnover. Finally, we cannot forget that in Brazil, these situations become more complex when we analyse other markers beyond age group, such as inequalities activated by the social class origin, gender, and race, situation of domicile rural or urban, country's region and work's quality.

### Contemporary debate about youth in Brazil

In the western urban societies, the youth is considered as a social condition bearing some characteristics, but deeply marked by two situations:

1. Emancipation of the primary socialization, based on family immersion, prolonged contact with the primary schooling cycle, with the residence area and the neighbourhood
2. Experimentation of other socializing institutions, such as secondary school, the world of work, peer groups, in what Berger e Luckman<sup>4</sup> denominated secondary socialization as "internalization of specialized institutional underworlds".

In short, to be a youth implies searching for autonomy in a more complex world, constituted by institutions that are markedly adult centred, that is, constituted by the prism and values of those that are not young anymore and see the youth from the standpoint of what they do not have: schooling and experience. If we consider this condition of emancipation of a close group for the insertion in another group—more distant and impersonal, but also more ample and complex—we will understand that youth characterizes itself as a kind of liminal social condition, in the sense pointed by Turner. It is demarked by transitional social processes that are fundamentals, as far as they delimitate, in the present, possibilities and limits of social insertion in the future.

Today in Brazil, a significant group of authors<sup>3,5-8</sup> consider the relationship between school and work as a fundamental element to understand important dimensions of our social inequality. Among the debates around the juvenile condition, we will address the problem of "transition to the adult life", more specifically the relationship between school and work in the scope of complex, difficult and unequal processes of social insertion of the youth in Brazil. Studies on the transition to the adult life seek to understand how, over time, institutions such as school, work, families, political parties, syndicates, religious congregation, and, more recently, peer groups and cultural groups establish combinations in a way to offer support to social insertion processes.

The Brazilian State only took the universalization of education as horizon with the 1988 Federal Constitution, known as "Citizen Constitution", promulgated after 21 years of military dictatorship that ended in 1985 with the transition to civil government. Brazil is, therefore, a young democracy, in which the universalization of the access to the Fundamental Education begun to be operationalized from the mid-1990 and the universalization of the Basic Education (Fundamental education and secondary education) happened only ten years after that. Thus, the transition process between school and work, important to the insertion in the adult life, was accomplished, for most of the youth, having work, and not school, as the reference institution. To the middle and upper classes, on the contrary, the school remained as the central institution regarding the process of their youths' social insertion.

This unfair dynamic strongly feed the historical Brazilian social inequality, since those who enter the world of work on the margins of school education tend to keep, through life, the social and economic conditions circumscribed to the kind of occupation characteristic of their first work admission. In contrast, those who accomplish the insertion in the world of work mediated by the school education, not only tend to have a more secure and distinct first social insertion but also conquer, thenceforth, a space to improve it throughout their working careers.<sup>5</sup> If the right to education started to be effective and massively extended to the whole of Brazilian youth just 50 years ago, with emphasis on the last 20 years, this means that the school has entered in the process of our youths' transition to adult life only recently. Even so, it is necessary to highlight the fact that, according to Cardoso, one regime of transition does not immediately substitute the other, but there is, for sure, a "sliding", a juxtaposition of regimes, where the old model of intensive exploitation of youths' work recreates itself on a new basis.

Therefore, is it fair to ask if in a country traditionally unequal and complex as Brazil it is possible that the State conducts the central problem concerning the offer of supports for the combination between school and work based on investment in specific sectorial policies? Or,

on the other hand, is it possible to develop, at the same time, sectoral policies, to solve a problem that is in the intercession between them? In this way, the process of transition school/work has been challenged by many changes.

### School expansion policies

The first set of recent expansion policies for education started to be implemented in the second half of the 1990 and was focused on the Fundamental Education. Its goal was the tackling of what was diagnosed as the biggest problem at the time: the culture of repetition<sup>3</sup> that reached significant amounts of children and teenagers, impeding them of finishing the Fundamental Education. School flow correction was the heart of an educational policy that lasted until the beginning of 2000. Its objective was the reduction of retention indices through the adequacy of the available infrastructure to provide services that are more effective to students in general. The main point of this policy was the acceleration of learning, operationalized through a program that sought to create school vacancies through the stimulation of learning processes without changing the available infrastructure.

The second set of expansion policies for education was implemented during the two mandates of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2006 and 2007-2010). Here, the focus is widened. The problem to tackle now refers to the educational inequalities in terms of access to all levels and modalities of education, and to inequalities involving school permanency, in view of the diversity of users attending the system. The need to ensure support for their formation process becomes clear in the form of several categories of grants for the students or by incorporating in the school curriculum the history and culture of groups historically discriminated. Many strategies were used to tackle the problem, such as: increase in the per capita investment; extension of the obligatory education from children education to secondary cycle (increasing the obligatory period of education from 9 to 13 years); expansion of technical education; popularization of access to universities; extension of school permanency policies in all levels, with improvements on scholarships, transport, school meals, and other grants.

On the higher education level, the expansion centre grew from the confrontation of historical and persistent inequalities of access to higher education, especially through Affirmative Actions of racial and social character, having a powerful symbolic impact in a country that suffered, for almost 400 years, the ulcer of slavery. Besides especial grants to quota holders at public schools, there is incentive for the expansion of campus accommodation and university restaurants. In 2003, the country had 45 federal public universities, distributed by 148 campuses; in 2015 there were 63 federal public universities, distributed by 321 campuses, characterizing an expressive expansion and internalization of the system under the federal government's responsibility.

The impact caused by those policies was significant: reduction of some of our most persistent educational inequalities, with the access extension to the medium and high level of education, especially among the poorer, the black population, women; Priority to the North, Northeast and Centre-West regions of Brazil; extension of the protection and support network, mobilized by the access to the education system in all modalities and levels.

<sup>3</sup>Tendency of the public school system in Brazil, which serves the social groups of vulnerable social insertion, to measure its effectiveness by the degree of difficulty imposed to the school success of most of its users.

Nevertheless, we face persisting problems. Unfortunately, we still have high rating of repetition and dropout at the basic level of education, in special in the final years of the fundamental and secondary cycle. In this way, at the same time we have progressed a lot in what concerns important indices for measuring educational efficiency, we have made it while maintaining serious problems yet to solve. Apparently, we operate by the model described by Castel<sup>12</sup> to think about the situation experienced by Latin America in the last 15 years. These authors show us that under the coordination of governments having a progressist matrix, the rights in our National States have been extended. One of the effects of this extension in countries with a long history of foreign dependency, as is the case of all South American countries, has been the general reduction of our historical inequalities and the expansion of rights to the whole population, formerly deprived of them. By other hand, it is also possible to notice, in those same countries, a resistance to the capillarization of such policies and actions among the social groups with a more vulnerable insertion.

### Work policies

Deregulation and insecurity of the formal bonds with the working world were important characteristics of the history of Brazilian capitalism. We have an economic system that is not built on work stability, but on its precariousness. This is true not only to youths but also to adults belonging to the working class. This precarity does not restrict itself to the economic sphere but is reproduced socially and politically. Although Brazil changed a lot in the last years, we still operate—and nowadays, more than ever—on a base that replicates itself through the maintenance of such inequalities. But, as Guimarães<sup>6</sup> shows, there are important particularities when facing the entrance of youths in the working world in Brazil. Here we highlight some of them:

1. Changes on productive sphere that affected the dynamics of the labour market, and, in special, the base of the occupational pyramid, extinguishing the jobs of “entrance”<sup>4</sup>
2. Coexistence with another demographic wave parallel to the young wave,<sup>5</sup> constituted by those who found themselves, in the nineties, at the peak of their productive capacity<sup>6</sup>
3. Poor quality of the labour market, with underpaid jobs, few guarantees and long working hours. In this scenario, the youth achieve transitions, at one time, intense and prospective “toward work”, characterizing a process of constant in and out of the labour market, search for better conditions and more qualified Jobs. This is quite common among the youth, both for the poor and middle class.

This situation imposes us some effects: unemployment among youths is three times higher than among adults. Even in periods of full employment there is a greater informality among the poorer youths, the women and the black population. In fact, the context where the schooling expands and the world of work insists in presenting itself as not very permeable to youths, creates what Guimarães<sup>6</sup> identified ten years ago as a paradox: an expected social destination by the youth—a transition with full social insertion - in confrontation to a lack of chances for a big portion of the new generations. The work policies

<sup>4</sup>Those unqualified Jobs through which the youths enter in the world of work

<sup>5</sup>Demographic tendency to the growing of the youth population, giving the country an “age bonus” regarding the capacity of development and production.

<sup>6</sup>The youths who attempted to enter the labour market had to face the ones who were already established on more stable bases.

for the youth during the cycle of public policies that took place between 2005 and 2015 has been distinguished attacking two fronts: development of strategies of qualification and policies of subsidised insertion of youths in the labour market. More recently, the bet was on a combination of professional qualification and intermediation for job insertion. However, as Gonzalez<sup>13</sup> shows, the difficulties met by the youth to get a decent job, in Brazil, do not occur because of lack of qualification; as the author describes, the policies for youth qualification and subsidised ingress fulfil different functions. In this matter, qualification programs are much more effective generating expectations of work than generating jobs.

We believe that great part of the difficulty to conciliate educational policies and work comes from the specificity of each field. Thus, in relation to education, the data and diagnosis are abundant and the intervention in the educational systems are under the responsibility of the State, making easier the identification of problems and the answers from the other actors that, in great measure, keep certain subjection, especially budgetary, to the federal government. The same does not occur with the world of work, for private interests dominates the so named “Market” and, despite of their dependency on transfer of money and subsidies from the State, they function moved by their own interests, strongly connected to the profit rate increase. In this case, we believe, parallel policies, dialoguing with parallel interlocutors, trying to achieve independent goals, will never solve the paradox performed in their lives on daily bases.

### Achievements, ruptures and retrocession

During the cycle of public policies between 2005 and 2015, Brazil invested more than ever in raising youth education standards, focusing on those that didn't have access to school or had experienced it for a short time, in troubled educational trajectories, especially youths belonging to social groups that are more vulnerable. The data we presented from this period shows that the investments made in some sectors had an impact on the youth's choices regarding their use of time, especially when we observe the distribution between studying and working. This cycle brought many advances, from the acceleration of schooling for youths that were hold back in the fundamental education to the expansion of secondary education. Its paradigmatic case is the explosion of enrolments at universities, rising from 4,6 million in 2005 to 7,8 million in 2014, extending its geographic distribution with a strong internalization of new universities, making the access more democratic and investing in permanency policies.

The country has experienced changes in the processes and forms of youth transition to adulthood that redefined the possible combination between education and work. The first and most important is the reduction of participation of youths aged 15 to 17 in the labour market. It characterizes an unprecedented situation in the Brazilian case, mostly for the youths of popular strata. They have been able to experiment, for the first time, the scenario of being only students. This is a reality for young women, principally. However, when we observe the cohort gathering youths aged 18 to 29, what draws our attention is the abrupt end of juvenile moratorium, namely the end of the condition of being exclusively students. As one advances on the age group, there is a loss of school centrality and a trajectory marked by ins and outs of the school system and of the labour Market. This is the cruellest characteristic of the current juvenile condition. The key transformation occurred at this period was a significant change on the strategies for the youth's participation in the formulation,

implementation and evaluation of the policies destined to them. The three Youth's Public Policies National Conference held in 2008, 2011 and 2015, were spaces for participation of distinct juvenile collectives where their rights were evaluated and proposals to extend those rights came forward. Having the Conjuve leading the national mobilization process, it happened through conferences that were organized in many administrative and territorial levels around the country, gathering a significant amount of youths which drew attention for their diversity of aspects, cultures and proposals. These conferences mobilized hundreds of thousands of youths and collectives to the National Conference that, each edition, gathered in Brasília around three thousand youths from all over the country.

In 2005, inclusion was the main goal of the policies destined to the youth, but their increasing participation in the deliberative processes fomented its critics and its extension, putting autonomy and emancipation at the centre of the debates. With this key we can understand the emphasis applied on defending decent work and on the inclusion policies defended by the engaged youth. On the horizon, it is necessary to overcome the current model that is timid in regulating the relationship between education and work, throwing responsibility exclusively on young people. This inclusive cycle ends on the second President Dilma Rousseff's government (2011-2014 e 2015-2016), with an institutional rupture that was consequence of a *coup d'état* in 2016, articulated by the parliament, dominated by corporate lobbies with the support of the judiciary system, and with a strong participation of the mainstream media. The objective of this articulation is to bring the period of re-democratization initiated in 1985 to an end and implement a Project that some authors have named as “non-democratic constitutional regimen”,<sup>14</sup> or “post democratic State”.<sup>15</sup> The logic of state becomes contrary to the social rights guarantees.

The retrocession is expressed in the proposals for the labour reform that suspend acquired rights since 1930 and make the work relationships more flexible and fragile. This equation favours exclusively the big business. But the parliamentary coup is expressed also in the reform of the secondary cycle of education. Both reforms go against all youth's recent demands, recreating the traditional division between school “for the rich” and “for the poor”.<sup>16</sup> To the first group, will be destined an extended education, full of traditional content, but incorporating also the humanistic dimension, with the target of preparing the best staffs to the best jobs. To the poor will be destined a fast education restricted to the basic abilities for the unqualified ingress in the job market, urged to take jobs no one wants. Likewise, the public universities have been through a process of “asphyxia”, with drastic budget cut and reduction in the teaching activities, research and university extension. In addition, there is the dissemination of privatisation discourses aiming to stop the ongoing expansion and democratisation of high education. However, a virtuous cycle of public policies as we experimented recently leaves marks on the institutions and students. This is not easy to forget, because identities were forged and rights were constituted. The social demands won't be extinguished, and they will appear, in a certain way organized manner, in the action of those people who had experienced a more intense democratic process. Although the changes of mentality must deal with a long sedimentation process, the strong juvenile participation on this cycle reminds us of Paulo Freire's “Pedagogia da esperança”. In this book, he presents a very interesting concept that he named “unprecedented viable”,<sup>17</sup> that he defined as something that has never been experimented, but nevertheless, is not impossible to

achieve. When we think about the Brazilian youth, with its importance on the definition of a project for a sovereign nation, it becomes clear that, more than ever, it is necessary to exercise the society's ability to bet on a new project. For this, it is necessary to keep the conditions of dialogue involving the whole society, particularly the youth themselves as important actors in the process of restoration of the democratic normality in the country.<sup>18</sup>

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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