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YOUNG MARIJUANA USERS IN PUBLIC SPACES IN MEXICO CITY

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> Understand how young marijuana consumers in public spaces in Mexico City define their transgressive practice and the relationships they establish with family members and authorities based on that practice.

Highlights

The central objectives of the project are the following:

i) to document the way young people occupy public space, appropriate it and claim their right to do so, and the way they define it; ii) to unveil the meaning that transgressive practice (consumption of marijuana in public spaces) has for the young people who perform it; iii) to identify the formal (legal and social) and informal (defined by the young people themselves) regulations in the development of their transgressive practice; iv) to deepen the relationships established by young consumers with their families, neighbours and other public space users such as police and civil authorities, thieves, vendors, young people who do not consume or who consume other substances (inhaled, alcohol); v) to accompany the activities of young people in the public space related to their transgressive practices, facilitating access to useful information for them and supporting the expression of their artistic and other interests; vi) to identify the authorities and organizations that act in the selected public spaces and to unveil their perceptions of young people's transgressive practices, as well as the activities that develop around these practices and the presence of young people in public spaces.

These objectives are based on the central concepts of the general project: youth, transgression, public space and regulation, while contemplating intervention processes, seeking that young people linked to the project are not only "objects" of research, but actively participate in the process and benefit from it

Currently, the development of the project is concentrated in Tianguis El Salado, a street market located in the Iztapalapa Delegation, east of Mexico City, which takes place every Wednesday. It is a space frequented by young consumers of marijuana, as well as other drugs or non-illegal substances, such as pulque and inhaled ones ("mona"), but whose consumption in public spaces is transgressive; in the market there are also young people who work as vendors or loaders, some also consume in their stalls and meeting spaces within the market, through a mixture of work and leisure.

We are developing a qualitative methodology, which privileges participant observation and field diaries of the visits made to the space, and interviews with young people, as well as with authorities and non-consuming adults, to contrast with the points of view of the community as a whole.

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Preliminary results

Although we are dedicated to carrying out fieldwork and have not yet begun to analyze and systematize information, there are already some lines of reflection that are beginning to emerge and on which we will probably focus during the following year in order to begin to publish results and scientific articles: i) the consumption of marijuana in public space is associated with a more general demand for the use of public space; ii) a position that has been gaining strength among young marijuana consumers is to modify the predominantly negative image of them, and demonstrate that being a marijuana consumer does not have to be synonymous with people who have failed, are unemployed, and have nothing to contribute socially; iii) the development of cultural activities in public space is one of the ways to appropriate and claim public space; iv) young people are aware of the risks they run when consuming marijuana in public spaces (both in terms of police persecution and exposure to assaults and aggressions by thieves who see them as easy targets because of the relaxing effects of marijuana), but they are still not willing to renounce doing it in public space; v) young marijuana users have different perceptions about the consumption of various drugs in the public space (alcohol, solvents and inhalants) and may even show rejection of some of them that they consider very harmful to health; these perceptions will serve as an element of contrast to better understand the meaning that marijuana consumption has for them; vi) gender condition has different implications in the practice of marijuana consumption in public spaces, and deepening these implications will be one of the lines of work during the following months.

Another line of work that seems profitable to us, and that was already proposed in the previous meetings of TRYMexico, is to compare the use of marijuana in two public spaces that are being approached in different case studies: the Tianguis El Chopo and the Tianguis El Salado. While the former had a greater dynamic of youthful consumption of marijuana in the past, now it is very little; the latter has a current dynamic of consumption of marijuana very nurtured and rooted by youth. It would be interesting to contrast these dynamics that also account for forms of public space appropriation, and the way they have been transformed through time.

In terms of methodological and practical reflection, we can highlight the following aspects: i) the building of trust in the relationship with young people has been placed as an element of great relevance during

the study. The frustrated attempts of studies in areas with high crime rates show the importance of distrust towards those who are foreign to them; ii) on the other hand, the type of approach that is proposed in the project, to make presence and an accompaniment through the time (several years), is something that gives confidence to the young people to work in the project. To feel that we are not only going with the intention of extracting information and leaving is something that they see positively and for which they are even thankful. Their most immediate attitude towards strangers who arrive in their spaces is one of distrust, and we have been dismantling their initial prudence with our constancy, visiting the market regularly, sharing with them, as well as with our support for the realization of activities of interest to them; equally important in this process of gaining the trust of the young people that one of the researchers of the project, Carlos Zamudio, is recognized for the project Biblioteca Cannábica, and for his activism in favour of user rights.



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What has been done this year

a. Development and homologation of theoretical concepts.

Two main concepts were developed: youth and transgression. Youth is understood from a sociocultural approach linked to lifestyle, and beyond the biological age. Transgression is understood from a sociological perspective as i) the result of a process of social definition, historically situated and contingent, for which there are no intrinsically transgressive behaviours; ii) transversal to the social space and central component of social life; iii) should not be considered an essential trait of any person; and iv) can mobilize diverse senses and expressive needs of individuals.

b. Exploration and selection of study area.

Different public spaces where drugs are consumed were explored to initiate the field study. The Tianguis El Chopo (as a meeting place) and the Colonia Santa Martha Acatitla (as a place of residence) were the first two spaces explored, but in the end not chosen because of the low presence of young people and the low consumption of marijuana in the former, and violence in the latter, where various criminal acts had the neighbours of the area on alert. We also explored the neighborhood of San Lorenzo (Iztapalapa), where we were able to get in touch with young residents and conduct some interviews; again, the development of violent acts made it difficult to maintain contact with them.

Finally, through one of the youths encountered in San Lorenzo and another young man from the Biblioteca Cannábica, we began to establish relationships with young consumers who participate in el Tianguis El Salado, both as visitors and vendors. In this space we have been able to consolidate stable relationships with at least 6 young people (4 men and 2 women) and we are in the process of strengthening the relationship with others. As part of the process of approaching the youth, the team contributed to organizing the "First Encounter on Marijuana in the East" (September 5), which took place in the market with the active participation of the youth, who shared their cultural expressions, emotions and reflections on marijuana consumption.

c. Information gathering (fieldwork).

Ten field journals have been produced, one for each visit to the street market; the journals are produced collectively. We elaborated a Interview Guide for the young people; at the moment interviews have been carried out with 3 young people, which are already transcribed. In addition, two surveys have been carried out in meeting places where marijuana is consumed, Plaza Lázaro Cárdenas (20 April) and in Tianguis El Salado (5 September). Preliminary results are already available for the former. Maps of the study areas have been elaborated, as strategies to appropriate the space, to locate and to better understand how it is practiced.



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What is planned next year

1. Research activities

Interviews (First semester). Conclude a first round of interviews with the young people who participate in the project on a regular basis. Initiate interviews with authorities present in the study area. (Second semester) Conclude a first round of interviews with authorities present in the study area. Begin interviews with adults living in the study area.

2. Living Labs

A meeting will be held with the young participants to train them in terms of their rights as marijuana users, at the demand of the young people. There will be 2 to 3 meetings in the studied area. We will begin developing a multimedia product during the second semester of the year (March-Aug 2019).

3. Dissemination Activities

Presentation of research results at two conferences. One national and one international. Preparation of an article to be presented in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Type of products planned for next year



> Artistic performance



> Scientific publication;



> Conference in a meeting



> Multimedia coproduction



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