

Bodily practices of youth in the urban context: skateboarding in the city of Colima.

**Salazar C Ciria Margarita<sup>1</sup>; Valdivia Morones Anahy<sup>2</sup>; Manzo Lozano Emilio Gerzaín<sup>1</sup>;**

**Torres López Guillermo<sup>3</sup>; y Pérez López Martha Patricia<sup>1</sup>.**

<sup>1</sup>Full-time researcher's professors at the School of Sciences Education, University of Colima, México.

<sup>2</sup>Graduate degree student of Physical Activity and Sport of the Autonomous University of Baja California, Campus Mexicali, México.

<sup>3</sup>Full-time researcher professor at the School of Literature and Communication, University of Colima, México.

### **Abstract:**

This research paper corresponds to a classic ethnographic study, which aims to explore the space of construction of new urban lifestyles and bodily practices in the young skaters of Colima. The study was delimited to an area identified as the Piedra Lisa located in the capital of the State of Colima, Mexico. The observation unit was comprised by 50 young people between 12 and 20 years old who practices skateboarding from Monday to Sunday between 16 and 21 hours. The method used was the ethnographic and a participant observation supported for 47 days, field notes and informal interviews as collection tools; Murdock's guide was used in the systematization and classification information. The result of this research paper is based on the description and ethnographic number data retrieved: identifying aspects of the young skaters, information about the development of physical skills, coordinative, conditionals and skateboarding expertise, meeting places and appropriation of public spaces, classification of the skaters by groups, the equipment used, and the social perception of themselves, of society, family and friends.

Keywords: Skaters, urban youth and bodily practices.

### **Introduction**

Speaking of young people is considered a stage of construction and experience of emotions, learning and friendships, to consolidate the future of life in society. Arribas and González (1987) mentioned that these experiences also trigger difficulties that remain in the majority of the

occasions in the open, without support or guidance by the family or government programs (Medina, 2010 in Cortés and López, 2012).

This provides the opportunity for young people to start in life by their classmates, neighbors, relatives of the same age, take and appropriate behaviors of protagonists' sight or other representatives of youth cultures. Generating standards behaviors and expressions that come out of adults and social system. (Cortés and López, 2012).

In México, young people aged from 15 to 29 represent a third part of the so-called demographic bonus; in 2010 this segment of the population represented 28.3% of all Mexicans. In the State of Colima<sup>1</sup> young people of this age accounts for 26.8% (INEGI, 2010) and have literacy school status of 98.4%. Most of these young people live in urban areas, as in many other worldwide cities (UNICEF, 2012), enjoying the advantages of attending school, medical services and recreational facilities.

However, countless numbers of children and young people living in vulnerability circumstances, in overcrowded housing, neighborhoods marginalized to the peripheries of the cities, poverty (CONAPO, 2012), scarce or unbalanced diet (INSP, 2011), broken families, limited recreational programs and reduction of the physical-sport activity (Ceballos, 2006), absent parents during the day, economic scarcity in homes, and physical and emotional abuses.

This vulnerability has touched Colima's youngsters, reducing the opportunities to develop their personality and enable their talents. ENA<sup>2</sup> in 2011, states that in 2008 the drug-taking of psychoactive substances in Colima's youngsters increased from 64% to 68% men and 70% in women. In the case of unemployment and lack of academic offerings, only 25% of young people are considered in Colima as "Ninis" (by its Spanish acronym: people neither study nor work), (2011).

The rest is included in informal activities of work, school and family demands<sup>3</sup>. At this same point, the use of spare time in the young people has changed, positive leisure is less now<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Colima is one of the 32 States that make up the Mexican Republic.

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Addictions.

<sup>3</sup> There are Young people in Colima, which already have their own families or must support their mother and/or siblings. Therefore, in many cases they combined their day's activities with school and the job.

<sup>4</sup> As regards in the use of spare time in leisure activities, we can suggest that young people not having social programs to consolidate their personal, employment and school competences, they do not have the ability to control the use of it; Villagrán

precisely, has led to the transformation of the bodily practices and societies standards health imbalance (Salazar, Manzo and Medina, 2013).

This problematic and social demand generates youth anxieties that are expressed by these groups according to the social context in which they manage (Feixa, 1998). In this way, young people imitate lifestyles that the means provides. Saravi (2010) mentions that the urban conditions propitious by the new forms of social coexistence, so youth behaviors has been redesigned with new and different ways to define by itself (Lemus, 2005), therefore, the need to do something different that motivates and carries them to encounter with bodily senses more significant (Aguayo, 2003) and with a high level of adrenaline (Cortés and López, 2012), although the rest of society sees it as a waste of time and acquisition of harmful lifestyles, which generally approaches into the sense of change and breaking-off their own youth behaviors against tradition. Cyclical and generational activity.

The experimentation in young people through bodily sense-perceptions constitutes the essence of being and existence. The body means the connection with all that surrounds it. In this meaning Gabriel Cachorro (2007:48) considers that social construction is mediated by the body; therefore, any human relationship will be impregnated with personal-cultural reference:

*“the body is a social and cultural reference object, the position of the body, the way of walking, talking, the gesticulation, bodily motions and an endless expressed declarations to realize that the body is more than the spirit’s incarnation that involves in the definition of the individuals and social groups”.*

Recent studies have generated social knowledge to understand the new ways of living the body and the construction of experiences and social participation of the communities. Bauman (2009) and Galindo (2013) talk about societies and the new ways to visualize, understand and study them, especially youth communities, whom are the ones that triggered new ways of urban living. Bauman appeals to the concept of fluid societies, where nothing is firm, everything is changing, whereas Jesús Galindo observes the phenomenon of the esthetics communities, characterized by not having an exclusive. The fluid state refers to the aspect of the changing social environments with reference at the present time, while Galindo constructs his vision of esthetic with regard to pleasure and preferences that lead to a particularly young group.

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y Scarnatto (2009) in one of its researchers say that this causes them to give up school, living with friends, family, active-positive recreation, physical activities, dedicating an enormous amount of time to television, internet, using the social networking indiscriminately and video games.

Daily, young people express what they think and prefer covered in the mark of the Tics (by its Spanish acronym: Information and communication technologies), which guides, shapes and confronts. In the case of bodily practices, young people have abandoned the rigid activities that do not allow the quick adaptation and simple incorporation, now they seek for less frustrating patterns of adaptation which then would cause them deserting by not complying with their demands.

Villagran and Scarnatto (2009 and 2011) takes up these positions in their research papers with urban practitioners subjects of parkour, skateboarding (Cortés, 2000; Freeman and Riordan, 2002; Camino, 2008; Marquez and Díez, 2009; Moore, 2013) and breakdancing. They observed that young people have preferences and create very specific senses of their bodily practices, as they form up ways of grouping and socialization, their legitimacy frameworks -manners to break or agree with the tradition, is the case for their disagreement of the practice of sports defined by the masses, their movements, their feelings, their motions and alternatives necessary to survive youth.

In a traditional pattern youth represents the Western society, a period of change, a break-off with the adult world, the biological and cultural space where the great social changes are generated. The youth's world is the beginning of the human transformation: breaking-off, the generation gap is already something cyclical, in each generation appears this change; it is a closed relationship between the individual training therefore the community and its person demands to imagine as such among of doing things and the meaning of itself:

*[...] The action is at the same time, certain configuration of physical movements and a liable implementation that is interpreted depending on the reasons of acting that explains it[...] According to the relationship that prevails among the concept of person and body, and that requires saying that the people are also bodies (Ricoeur, 2003:74)*

Galindo (2013) states that young people, unable to find identity flexible spaces and quick access construction, have had to occupy in the same city public spaces, parks or streets, or find ways to live its youth in various urban contexts expressing their feelings and preferences (Lemus, 2005).

These youth emergencies are now bodily settling and exhibiting in places that were not used before; the esthetic communities, has as a motive to express and be the center, now they are

moving and installing in public, vibrant and socially active areas, they are no longer traditional and static.

In the physical practice case, urban youth are not satisfied with sports tradition: is rigid, regulated and based on competition (Villagran and Scarnatto, 2011), nowadays, they prevail a practice way of physical activity that energizes, provides them bodily pleasures that makes coordinative neuromuscular sensations, an extension of the body, it becomes vibrant and provides them presence in the urban scenery (Cachorro, 2012).

Therefore, the research paper presented here aims to explore the construction space of new lifestyles and bodily practices in urban youth of Colima, Mexico, since the experience and life of Colima's youngsters who practice skateboarding, to know the use and perception they have of their activity regarding to the city's notion.

### **Object of study**

The present object study research, considers first exploring the youth bodily expressions that practice skateboarding, trying to know the bodily construction of physical-sport that arises in cities thereafter the new forms of urban lifestyle, and in the absence of research approaches in the region.

In the city of Colima, Mexico has happened that youth skaters groups have grown significantly, have migrated from confined practice areas (Skate Park in the outskirts) to the streets-main avenues, malls and spaces of concurrency, and urbanites central parks. In addition to that, in the past year, new practitioners have emerged which gives up the traditional sports ways, even young people who mix practice of skateboarding with practice of sports (soccer, basketball, cycling etc.).

From a purely emotional appreciation, these practices have transformed the city scenery, saying of the relations between citizens and skaters gestate. These are elements that invite to a deepen observe and know Colima's skaters, the motivations that generates the skateboarding for its practice, the places that these young people use, their ways of thinking, preferences, association elements, language, codes. The universe that is constructing from its physical exercise to integrated into the city life.

In this first moment, our gaze comprises three units of analysis: the benefits, the use of a personal and urban skateboarding confine, and the third, social and family perception of the skaters (See Diagram 1).

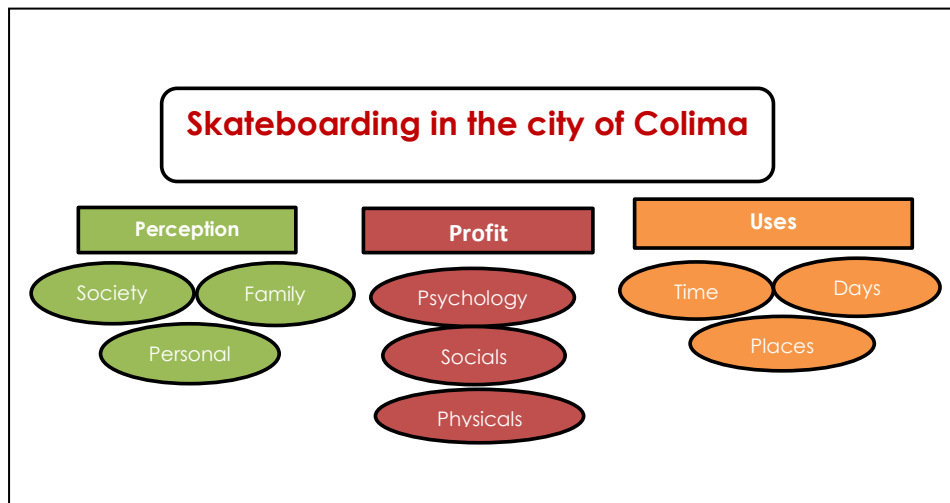


Diagram 1. Object of study.

## Material and methods

Empirical data is required due to the characteristics of the study, obtained first-hand, which is why immersed in a qualitative framework of the ethnographic method, allows to have an active observation in the data collection, "*participant observation referred to situations in which the researcher actually participates in the customs and activities of the society*" (Adams, 1971: 28) in this case, it was observed young people who practice skateboarding in the Piedra Lisa.

A representative selection of skaters was necessary, informal talks were held to more than 50 young people (between 12 and 20 years old), including 15 key informants "*reliable reporting agents, eager to communicate what they know about their community*" (Pelto, 1965: 67), to obtain the data of living voice of the subjects of study.

Subsequently we resorted to the Field Note, which is recorded what was observed, conversations and described the field work, prior in a second stage is recorded "*an accurate description*" (Malinowski, 1995: 20) of what it was experienced since the first moment. After supplying daily the Field Note, we realized the task to systematize the information. The next step was the sort out description and classified data under Murdock's Guide which has the objective of "*Classify with systematic opinion the data in existence, in such a way is made possible and*

*easy to find the necessary information for the study of a particular issue at any moment*". (1989:1)

Another technique used in the collection process was the interview, understood as the maximum possible personal interaction between the investigated subject and the researcher in principle it occurs in the situation of the so-called open interview (dialogue of person to person) more or less directive way. It can be more or less supported by a certain "*technical device*", consisting of the submission of the subject's attitudes scales investigated and even in certain psychodramatic situations (Ricoeur, 1975). However, widely used in the investigation was the individual open interview, which tends to be very productive for typical or extreme cases' study. But above all, to reveal the relationships of the personal identity with the cultural models of personality, reflected in another generalized or social superego, ideal of and of the interviewee roles.

Often takes the form of opinions and attitudes survey method, is articulated through verbal exchanges between interviewer and interviewee, and sometimes practically tends to be limited to record and process what the subject interviewed says: produces oral responses to oral questions (answers to questions as the age of the interviewee or his employment status as a worker, beliefs, values and purposes of the speaking subject, escape at its maximum level of depth and articulation (Orti, 1996).

## **Results**

To organize the derived data from the co-existence with young skaters, there are three major themes: skateboarding's benefits, in second time, the common usages and practices, finally, social perceptions.

### *1. Physical benefits of skateboarding*

**a) Balance:** it is one of the main abilities developed through skateboarding. Acquired by the fact of getting on and moving the skateboard without falling off at a certain distance and routinely causes the domain of the balance. The development of the coordinative abilities is a fact in this sport; skaters placed balance in their legs and arms on each one of the balancing tricks. Trying one and another time and improving it in each attempt.

**b) Coordination:** for different movements - changing leg, turning the skateboard at the right time, bend and stretch-, power strength of the muscles in the lower extremities.

**c) Stamina (Endurance):** in combination with the previous ability, endurance plays an important role in this practice, the routes and time these young people spend; at the same it obtains endurance acquisition and finally the skill for the achievement of new tricks.

**d) Physical risks:** the contradictory elements in this practice are that, as a result of a lack of discipline and protect certain cares or have a specialist to guide a previous warm-up. Although according to some of the young people observed, many skateboard from their homes to the place where they are congregated and this prepares the body for the skateboarding movement. However, others have to aboard the urban transport; therefore no prior physical preparation is widespread with the risks involved.

**e) Body Composition:** thinness is a peculiarity of the observation group of young skaters, unlike who roller-skate and ride bikes. Although they are subdivided into groups in the Park, the absence of obesity is remarkable; inclusive the skaters are located mostly in lowered weight.

**f) Energy consumption:** it's remarkable in this activity; most walk/skateboard to arrive to the Park, the rest combines it with public transport (bus or taxi). Approximately between 1 and 2 hours they skateboard with not more than 3 minutes of rest periods. Time to breath, reduce pain and chat with the other skaters. The energy consumption of the activity can be calculated between 250-400 calories per practice. By the type of exercises that they perform, rises and jumps.

## *2. Common uses y practices*

**a) Skate practice area: Colima's illustrious rotunda in the park of "La Piedra Lisa":** The Piedra Lisa Park is a traditional place for the recreation of Colima's inhabitants, located on a road full of vegetation and is very close to downtown of the capitals' state, it is an ideal meeting point for relaxation and the practice of different outdoor activities. It has an area of small typical and fast food restaurants next to another very wide side a playground, at the end are soccer and basketball courts. Recently some changes were implemented that led tradition to break: the state government decided to build an interactive museum, whose infrastructure was approached for infants and a monument dedicated to the memory of Colima's men and women, whom have contributed to the development and history of the place: Colima's illustrious rotunda.



An altar precisely at the end of this level ground is sheltered with a number of columns - one for each illustrious character - and that has lateral ramps to facilitate the access to this section, has been in the city the core of meeting young skateboarding practitioners.

The image is contrasting because its a site dedicated to the history, saying, to the past with all the quietness that such purpose offers because young people appeared on their skateboards: sliding along, up and down by the ramps, spinning in front of the level ground. Mostly men, it seems that this place becomes exclusive for this bodily practice that innovate the describing customs of this Mexican province.

**b) Classification of "La Piedra Lisa" parks' skateboarding groups:** groupings arise according to age:

Group 1. With six members aged from 12 to 15. Perform low impact tricks as the Ollie and Kick flip case, are characterized by a calm and healthy appearance with difficulty elements of low grade, relaxed pace, with more rest time where they take advantage to hydrate or chat with their friends.

Group 2. Is the largest group, ranging that goes from 16 to 19 years old with approximately 17 members, most of them have a considerable time skateboarding, it can be considered that they manage a medium difficulty grade by performing the following elements: Indy, Melon, Behinana, Roastbeef, Christ Air, Nosegrae. Some elements already with a high mastery grade: Axle Stall, Nose Stall, Rock to Fakie, Rock'n Roll, Boneless, Invert, Handplant. This group spends more hours practicing, less rest time and more consistency in their daily attendance.

Group 3. They are 5 young people aged from 19 to 21, which skateboard on a lighter and faster way with their own specific techniques, with the least possible rest time, they do not perform so many tricks, and they focus more on only skateboarding with a higher speed. Curious information of these youngsters is that not everybody always goes at the same time because of the different occupations: school or job.

**c) Time of experience:** information was obtained through a dialogue with young skaters about their time of experience toward this practice. Three groups were organized in response to the duration of their practice: 1) Young teenagers with one to three months skateboarding. 2) Those whose experience exceeds three months to a year. 3) Subjects with one to three years.

**d) *Young skater's clothes:*** the majority of young people used the same style of clothing. Stretch jeans, the most dominant colors are blue, black and brown; preferably plain loose-fitting shirt and foreign trademarks. A cap is another very particular characteristic, and those who do not use it, the haircut are long and hairstyle. Also they come and skateboard with a small backpack on their back and hearing aids. Unlike other disciplines considered sport, the clothes do not require specifications, with the same clothes you can skateboard as to any other commitment.

**e) *Youth skater's preferences, hobbies and behaviors***

In their manner of speaking, their own youth slang words is used: prat, bastard, dude, since they are in the position of breaking rules and in full freedom. Most smoke without considering consequences, for them is part of the skateboard style. Their personality is in egocentrism, not annoys others, and is serious, intense in its expressions, in other cases distracted, some simple express little interest in school. Also appears in the end: overbearing, rude and even grotesque. They like hip-hop, rap and reggae music because they feel identified with the lyrics or the artist's personalities such as Bob Marley or Shaggy.

**f) *Equipment and the use of it:*** according to the observed, different styles of skateboards are used: Longboards. Are used downhill, wheter racing, slalom, or simply as a means of transport. Being width, gives more stability, security, and comfort that a normal skateboard. Its size and weight makes them less appropriate for skateboarding tricks.

Street skateboards: are prepared with more wooden sheets that the normal ones to avoid imminent breaks of the skateboard and have more metal axles covered to facilitate its slide along on rough surfaces. They need a special hardness on their axles because it requires greater support in the falls, increasing hardness to the wheels is necessary to prevent its deformation through laterals rugged blows, or manuals as rail switch, flip and half flip, which during the landing -after an obstacles jumps - can deformed them enough, or with the two rail handstand side shovit that its particular position can very significantly deform them.

Skateboard tricks: Are special skateboards for skateboarding parks, as they weigh a bit more, are ideal to make spins and move through steep ramps.

**g) *Skills and tricks.*** Specific abilities that practitioners develop are called tricks, as if they were magic effect, provokes' space domain, involving velocity and specialization of motions that can be achieved only through experience and dedication.

The placement of the feet on the skateboard is very important in the development of the tricks: if the left foot is in front is said that the skater is “*normal*”, whereas if it’s the right one is said that it is “*goofy*”. This affects the performance of the tricks and the position called "switch" which measures the difficulty of the control in the feet.

The most basic trick is the Ollie, which is the jump that occurs with the skateboard when a trick is done going backwards says that it has become “*fakie*”. When spinning on the air, if the rotation is inwards, “*giving the back*” is “*backside*”. While outwards, “*giving the face*”, it is said to be “*frontside*”.

### 3. *Social Perceptions*

**a) *Family*:** some receive support from their parents; the acceptance goes from a hobby to sport. In other cases the parents consider this activity a waste of time, they are classified as lazy person and lacking family support.

**b) *Piedra Lisa ’s community*:** the acceptance is total while talking with some visitors of the Park. They have given up the central Park area, considering that "it is better seeing them enjoying a hobby, exercising and do not harm anyone [35 year old lady] ". However, another sector that does not precisely attends the Park, the behavior of these young people not far beyond a waste of time, lazy persons meeting without a job and bad image to the public space.

**c). *Peers (Friends)*:** questioning them about their friend’s perception of its saketboarding practice, they receive positive speeches; the majority perceives the activity as novel and interesting. It is important to point out that skaters have made friends in the parks where they skateboard.

**d) *From and with the skateboard self-perception and experiences*:** each person speaks of a different process, a particular way of living this bodily practice, where we can speculate located constructs between what is desirable and possible, where the truth will have to be judged from an experiential world perspective that is still limited. Some extracted personal stories told by young people:

i) This is the best because it does not have an established fixed schedule, and is not excluding, overwhelming or tedious practice, everything forgets and only he and skateboard exist at the moment skateboarding begins.

ii) "Skateboarding is a fashion or trend, says [skaters] that skateboarding has given them visibility and popularity, has managed to meet friends and girls, become their lifestyle and an escape for not to being at home".

iii) "My mom is in the United States and I did not see her much, I live with my dad, but he does not pay me much attention and interest, my behavior doesn't matter to him... at what time I arrive or what activities I do during the day, nor that I smoked marijuana, he tells me that he has consumed marijuana since he was 16 years old [the father] and therefore I brought it in the blood" [Skater].

iiii) "*I am married, have a son and was two years in prison, to me skateboarding represents a culture, a way to challenge the government and break their rules to make me apparent in public spaces*" [Skater].

## **Discussion**

According to what is observed skateboarding physical activity makes up an appropriating space process inhabited by the young urban. The city, a symbol of modernity and evolution tends to decrease physical activity therefore the location of the groups for the skateboarding can be the result of the search for young people to achieve a certain level of autonomy for its corporeality. The movement is a space abstraction beyond a series of actions carried out by the body and the relationship of the human body with the objects in the context.

Among the perceived benefits, beyond of the physical-biological achievement, they accept a social wealth that favourable meetings with others in equal circumstances (family problems, scarce food and substances consumption). Among the most important findings of the study, subdivisions groups are observed based on physical ability, sporty style, socioeconomic status, gender and group of friends; the urban skaters over 15 years old have found in this practice the means of personal styling and frustration expressions, bitterness and contradictions of the age; the youngest skaters, strengthen their self-confidence improving their physical skills.

A situation that reflects the characteristics of the equipment is the skater's personality towards the individual achievement. The skateboard is designed for a single person therefore movements involve the lower extremities and lower back. Conceding they gather to practice routines, rather than feel impugned socially they pinpoint a territory that ensures their skateboard to be free to do movement.

The grouping practitioners of this movement discipline makes visible the sense of organization offering today's society to young people, since the generational confrontation is a cyclical element: each period presents the separation between the new and the previous. It seems that there is no such breaking but the transformation process that involves the social revives. Young skater feels and auto-called rejected in the majority of the cases but lacking in information regarding a study for example involving family stories and in-depth interviews. The separation with adult will have the impact that each family or social core pointing as relevant the ethical code which manages.

Thus, skateboard's practice in the city of Colima reflects an area of opportunity to systematize youth activity which in turn generates productive relevant proposals to this sector of the population that is subordinated to social imaginaries and institutional operations. It is in an area of opportunity to appreciate demonstrations of different disciplines that arise in the grouping youth; far from gang, degradation and social manipulation meaning, the concept transformed in to be young in a Mexican province implies a search for options for a fulfilling life that it becomes the ego towards us in a permanent transformation state.

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