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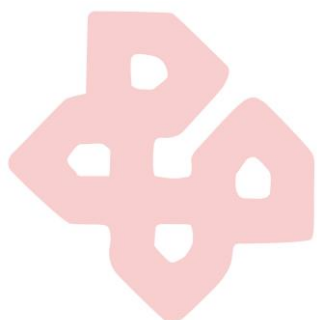
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MOBILITY AND VULNERABILITY IN THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION OF RURAL YOUTH IN MEXICO



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Abstract:

In the rural towns of central Mexico, one of the most decisive consequences of the slow deagrarianization of the countryside is the fact that its youngest population have had their access to educational possibilities and their economic income curtailed, whilst they are also the protagonists of an intense dynamic of displacements between their place of residence and medium-sized and large metropolitan areas. Current social-anthropological scholarship links this kind of mobility to strategies for survival in precarious and vulnerable conditions which lead to a significant diversification of occupied spaces. Within this context, the aim of this article is to identify and understand the dynamics of geographical mobility in the school-to-work transition among rural youngsters in seasonal conditions of social-economic hardship. The research took place between 2013 and 2020, using an anthropology-based methodology with fieldwork which included using techniques to record multi-sited ethnographic information involving people who move on a daily basis. Its goal was to develop a case study that allowed for the analysis of the data within its social context. Research findings allowed us to reflect upon how, in contexts of structural precarity, young people's prioritizing of seeking varied and distant paid work, together with their subsequent early leaving and intermittent attendance of school, add up to a cumulative path of disadvantages which are learnt and socialized at the home of origin. Within this framework, daily mobility

becomes an integral component of such adverse life-paths, thus co-producing conditions of high vulnerability for rural young people in very heterogeneous but constant ways.

Key Words: Mexico; mobility; rural youth; school-to-work transition

1. Introduction

Statistics in Mexico indicate that 75% of the occupied population who live in rural locations do not carry out primary activities; that is, they are not employed in agricultural jobs (INEGI, 2020). This data coincides with the perspective of the slow deagrarianization of the countryside (Carton de Grammont, 2009; Kay, 2008) and the growing importance of mobility for reasons of education and/or work between rural locations, towns and metropolitan areas (Saraví, 2015; Sheller, 2017). Two aspects offer an explanation for this dynamic. Firstly, over approximately fifty years the rural population in Mexico has gone from representing 57% (INEGI, 1970) of the total population of the country to only 22%, due to migration, the expansion of metropolitan areas and the degree of mobility between regions (INEGI, 2020). Secondly, 57.6% of the population who are over 15 travel for work (46.3%), or for education (11.3%), whilst the level of mobility for work reasons in rural locations lies between 60% and 88% (ONU-Hábitat, 2015). Of course, the statistical information does not describe the types of displacement with exactitude; nevertheless, it is evident that mobility is a central and unavoidable factor in the social reproduction strategies of present-day rural subjects (Farrugia, 2015).

In this context, the transition from school and training to work (henceforth *school-to-work transition*) in rural areas not only translates into an increase in cases of those combining studies with some kind of work, but also into diverse social-cultural changes, subjectivities and greater expectations as to the possibilities and alternatives that new generations (men and women) create to design their daily journeys towards different places. Contemporary rural spaces thus present with huge dynamism, whereby interactions, the integration of multi-sited populations and influences potentially take place, both between different rural locations and from and towards urban centres. The traditional representation of people as fixed to only one space -the rural one- has, of necessity, become more complex: the displacements and practices of the population across locations, towns and/or regions has given rise to a space which is ever more flexible and dynamic (Delgado-Campos & Ruiz, 2009; Rosales, 2012).

In the same way, the gradual increase in connectivity and the use of communication networks and transport in the majority of Mexico's regions have permitted a disconnection between the place of residence and places of education and/or work and, in consequence, a large number of rural subjects make daily, pendular journeys between their home and the places where they carry out a plurality of activities each day (Salas & González-Fuente, 2014). Indeed, as never before, this kind of mobility is a feature that is specific to contemporary rural areas and, in practice, this is seen in an evident way in the school-to-work transition. Even more, this mobility generates actions, relationships and strategies that, depending on

their characteristics and forms, can consolidate and entrench already existing social inequalities (Farrugia, 2015; Hidayati et al., 2021; Ramírez, 2015).

On the basis of this concept, the objective of this work is, on the one hand, to identify geographical mobility in the school-to-work transition of young people, men and women, indigenous or not, who are residents in rural contexts of ongoing social-economic deprivation located in the centre of Mexico¹; and, on the other, to analyse and interpret the said mobility in relation to an unequal access to educational institutions and to the economic income linked to wages. In this way, it seeks to record daily mobility by establishing the activities and the journeys (the objective dimension) that subjects undertake in order to attend schools, look for and/or access their first paid jobs and attempt to design their lives, based on the stories of their moves and strategies (the subjective dimension). Finally, it highlights that current analysis of the school-to-work transition in conditions of structural precarity should of necessity take daily displacements into account.

2. Theoretical clarifications

The school-to-work transition is complex by its very definition, due to the wide diversity of school and training itineraries, and to the excessively changing structure of work, today characterized by high levels of precarity, deregulation, flexibility, insecurity and uncertainty (Tejerina, 2020). In this context, our proposal is to define the school-to-work transition not as a time of unemployment or empty time between being a student and being a worker, but rather as a process that begins when the student actively seeks employment until full-time work becomes their main activity (Ng & Feldman, 2007). In other words, the school-to-work transition is understood as the grouping of acquisitions, expectations and actions of the student actor and how these are made concrete in a process of social positioning or adopting a social class within the structures of work (Casal et al., 2011). The barriers that young people have to face and the strategies they use to enter the workplace represent a “kind of barometer, both of the logics of integration imposed by the work market and by the life conditions they generate” (Dávila & Ghiardo, 2011: 1183).

In this sense, for young people of precarious social-economic groups such as those of the rural populations of the centre of Mexico, school enters into competition with other spheres of life early on, above all with their obligations towards their families and paid jobs (González-Fuente et al., 2018). Specifically, the relationship between school and work has lost its sequential nature, so that “the entering and leaving of the work market and educational institutions are much more frequent than

¹The region of the centre of Mexico has a population of more than 37 million inhabitants, which is 33.1% of the total population of the country (INEGI, 2020). Two of the entities with the highest population on a national level are located in this space, Mexico City, which has almost 9 million inhabitants, and the State of Mexico, with more than 16 million. These characteristics generate a high-density population (1,088 inhabitants per square kilometre), although it should be noted that the density tends to be unbalanced throughout the territory.

they used to be” (Jacovkis et al., 2020: 291). In fact, the grouping of intersections and cumulation of precarities usually unleashes recurrent interruptions which turn educational trajectories into a winding unsettled road with frequent setbacks, more than a linear and progressive route (Saraví, 2015; Tejerina, 2020; Torche, 2010). Additionally, the impossibility of accessing higher levels of education acts as an impediment to getting jobs with better conditions.

In accordance with the interests of this research, precariousness is understood to exist in close association to vulnerability. In the first place, “precariousness” is understood as a multidimensional concept that brings together categories such as work instability (temporary employment), the insecurity and degradation of work conditions, wage insufficiency and lack of protection in benefits and social rights (Rubio, 2010). To the consideration of rural spaces can be added the vital need of the population to move in search of work to different regional, urban and national spaces (Farrugia, 2015). Undoubtedly, this significantly increases the exposure of people to multiple risks and threats in workspaces -some extra-legal-. Without being exhaustive, we refer to contexts where there is a predominance of informality, uncertainty, the presence of various types of exploitation, discrimination, segregation, social conflict, lack of services, the proliferation of addictions, delinquency and, in general, various forms of work-related violence (Neffa, 2010).

In second place, sociology uses the term “vulnerability” to characterise dimensions of poverty that cannot be captured with monetary indicators of income and consumption (Alwang et al., 2001). Thus, vulnerability registers the weaknesses - or strengths- of the population, as well as the (in)abilities to respond to risks. Applied to observing social-economic systems, vulnerability is rooted in social structures, so that work instability, lack of benefits and the fragility of social relationships (disjointed networks and communities), operate in such a way as to diminish the ability to deal with it and so avoid damaging outcomes (Kim & Bostwick, 2020). Specifically, rural populations have experienced a precariousness that limits the strengthening of their livelihoods, the defence of their social and work rights and, in sum, the construction of their future (Horcas López et al., 2015). The vulnerability is made worse when the threats are unknown (Cutter, 2003) and there is a lack of tools with which to deal with the risks derived from educational and work uncertainties (Bergstrand et al., 2015). These factors reduce the margin for manoeuvre for young people to be able to design their future, which often depends on their individual skills, taking advantage of opportunities, belonging to networks and/or chance (González-Fuente et al., 2018; Saraví, 2015; Tejerina, 2020).

In this context, the number of young people who have to undertake daily mobility as a vital survival strategy is large (Farrugia, 2015). From the proposed social–anthropological perspective, it is therefore a question of observing processes that show both the structure of present-day societies as well as the subjectivities it gives rise to. On the one hand, the mobilities demonstrate in a precise way the tangible fact that all places are connected as a minimum to thin networks of connections that extend beyond each one of those places, and that, in accordance with certain historical conditions, they can change their cultural meanings (Sheller & Urry, 2006). On the other hand, those involved in such mobility accumulate and

deploy know-how based on knowledge, networks, contacts and help that “acts as a kind of work socialization” (Santamaría, 2012: 134).

It should be noted at this point that a space whose territorialisation is undergoing movement is not limited to two locations (origin and destination), but rather comes about in stages and transits that can be central to people’s life experience. This shows that the mobility of subjects is not a simple free, nomadic and self-determined flow, but rather that it depends on a particular geography and history (Vega Solís et al., 2016). In the social-historical context of flexible -neoliberal- capitalism, in which the economic employment of populations implies great mobility, flexibility and work deregulation, it can be highlighted that contemporary mobilities respond to a social-economic and territorial structure that is deeply unequal. However, this employment also depends on the capacities, skills, opportunities, experiences and/or random situations of the individuals. In other words, being “in movement” is contingent, unequal and contested, according to the differential materiality, spatiality, temporalities and eventualities involved in movement, meetings and access, and which are often taken for granted (Sheller, 2017: 628).

In short, the mobility linked to the school-to-work transition gives rise to trajectories and strategies that, depending on the characteristics and forms in which these take place, can transform and generate spaces that are differentiated by the forms that the process itself takes on (Ramírez, 2015). Thus, studies on unequal mobilities (Hidayati et al., 2021; Le Gallo et al., 2017) take into account factors such as the length of time of the displacement (long journeys for vulnerable groups) and/or the means of transport used (public and low-cost), aspects that will be borne in mind in the description of the cases. Finally, this research aims to analyse the connectors between the structural dimension of precariousness that is generalised in rural societies and the daily experience of vulnerability, a context in which mobility is an indicator of differentiated access that only serves to highlight the unequal forms of present-day social reproduction.

3. Methodology

With the aim of identifying and analysing mobility in the school-to-work transition of the young people of rural populations in the centre of Mexico, the research was carried out using a methodology characteristic of anthropology and the social sciences that combines diverse ethnographical fieldwork techniques and the building of a case study. Specifically, between 2013 and March 2020 several field stays took place with a minimum length of 2 weeks and maximum of 6 months, and visits around various locations of 19 municipalities in four states (State of Mexico, Tlaxcala, Puebla and Hidalgo). During this process, different methodological strategies were applied. First, between 2015 and 2017 a questionnaire was designed and given to 129 young people between 15 and 29 years old through which educational and work trajectories were identified in a general manner. Second, out of the young people, 32 men and 30 women were chosen who represented the school-to-work transition in a significant way in the sense of being in school and in

search of or having recently entered a paid job for the first time. Next, with the aim of identifying the subjective construction of experiences in the school-to-work transition, semi-structured interviews were held in different stages during 2018 and 2019 with the 62 young people and they were accompanied on their daily school and work journeys. Finally, from the information recorded through the observations and interviews, an ethnographic content analysis was carried out. Specifically, we worked to classify the following topics and order them in a matrix table: parent/guardian level of studies; parent/guardian activities; educational trajectory; work trajectory; work expectations; personal consumption; residential trajectory; social capital; family trajectory; and characteristics of the trajectories.

Using these methodological strategies, the main interest of the research has been to record the activities and the stories of the young people that took place during the journeys to school and in the search for and accessing their first paid jobs. In this sense, it is not places that are studied but rather multi-sited subjects. Following Marcus (1995: 101), we consider that a multi-sited ethnography is that which constructs observation and reflection through chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of places in which the researcher establishes their presence, under the explicit and sited logic of associations or connections between the places that would define the argument of the ethnographical production. In this regard, the multi-sited not only attempts to analyse the individual actions of the subjects with respect to social-cultural forms of places, but also focuses on the construction and development of those subjects through those journeys. This goes beyond the subject's own situation within a relationship system that is usually previously delimited and defined in accordance with the simple concept of space or territory. In sum, this exercise allows for the observation of the mobility that is generated by a majority of the contemporary Mexican rural population, showing the daily practices and the meanings of the subjects; and it permits us to show those concrete realities, which refer to ways of subjectively and objectively structuring their existence in the world. The strategy of following that which is in movement has shown itself to be efficient for analysing various empirical and theoretical concerns. In that sense, a large part of the ethnography of mobilities takes place in places of passage, places of transit and places of shared living. Mobility is therefore considered the ideal place where anthropology can *perceive*, *study* and even *touch* various present-day social-cultural formations (Salazar, 2020: 6).

4. Results and discussion

The research results will be presented through three cases which have been chosen from amongst the 62 young people interviewed. The choice of Gustavo, Diana and Itzel² answers to the criteria of sex (two women, one man), area of work (agriculture and services) and a diversity of displacement experiences. For each of the subjects, a narration is presented by the researchers of the accompaniment

² People interviewed names that appear in the text do not correspond to the real ones.

referring to a specific day or moment in their daily journeys that was considered to be paradigmatic.

4.1. Precarious school-to-work transitions. The case of Gustavo

The day that we arranged to accompany Gustavo, he woke up earlier than usual for two reasons. The first was that the strong rains of the past days in the Tlaxcalan municipality of Nativitas had turned the dirt roads that are the norm in the town into mudflats³. In those conditions, Gustavo has to leave 15 minutes early to walk with his bicycle until he reaches a paved street or road, and from there, pedal another 40 minutes to reach the vocational college where he is training to be a Machine Tools technician. The other reason was that Gustavo had not been to the educational centre for two days due to the fact that, as had happened on that occasion, when his father finds temporary work in construction, he must help with the domestic work at his home of origin and, specifically, go out to collect grass to feed the two cows that they keep at home. Whenever he misses school, Gustavo finds out about the work and sends e-mails to the teachers so that they do not throw him off their courses due to his repeated absences. The year before he had to repeat a term because his mother was ill for some months, and he had to take care of his younger sister (Gustavo is the third of four children). His family encourage him constantly to continue studying. However, due to the expenses of home and school, he has had to look for paid jobs and work at various activities at weekends.

On that day that we accompanied Gustavo we arrived before 9 in the morning at school, where he usually stays until around 2 in the afternoon. His time of departure depends on whether his assignments require a computer with Internet access. When this occurs, due to the lack of connectivity infrastructure in his area, his first option is to stay in the computer room at this school or, instead, look for a cybercafe on his way home. Whatever the case, Gustavo does not usually arrive home before 5 in the evening, the time to attend to his domestic duties.

Gustavo's father works at different activities, as a builder or agricultural labourer under a contract of *mediería*, that is, the landowner provides the land, and he provides the work for them to divide the harvested product in two. This way, Gustavo's family obtains corn as the basis of their diet and hay for their animals. His mother is employed as a kitchen assistant and does cleaning jobs at the homes of some families in the neighbouring town of Puebla. Gustavo's family responds to the model of pluri-active domestic unit that is normal of the Mexican rural zones, with multiple jobs in different sectors and places, combined with spaces where the youngest go to school (Salas & González-Fuente, 2014). In fact, the need to complement different kinds of income amongst various members of the family group is the unavoidable result of work precariousness (Neffa, 2010) and, as we have been

³ Gustavo was born and lives in a town of about 60 residents. This community was built approximately 30 years ago on the ruins of a former *hacienda*. The place was invaded by a group of families mostly from a neighboring town who had not been reached by the agrarian distribution.

establishing, generates a situation that increases vulnerability as an expression of poverty (Alwang et al., 2001).

In the specific context of Gustavo's school-to-work transition, the young man hopes to finish his studies to work in some factory in the region. Gustavo is convinced that education is a means to improving his life conditions:

I don't want the same thing to happen to me as happened to my brothers [the two oldest], who were doing well, but then couldn't [...] In addition I know I can help more if I get a good job, and for that you need to be educated and continue studying, to be trained and that way wherever you go they will give you work or something [...] Our parents do what they can and so I have to as well, they want us to study so we can be different, not like them, country people [...] it is not that we don't like the country, here we live off it, but they themselves tell us to be something else, that we must be what we want.

Gustavo represents a paradigmatic case in Mexico of a precarious school-to-work transition, that is, a context of constant social-economic deprivation, with "little room for manoeuvre" (Santamaría, 2012: 132): parents/guardians who did not go to school, low incomes in relative and absolute terms, and early, intermittent, informal and precarious work trajectories (begun in the domestic context), so that their expectations of "being different" and leaving the countryside disappear. Thus, in macro-social terms, young people from urban localities have 18% more possibility of access to better educational levels than those from rural localities. More specifically, a young student from an urban locality has between 300% and 400% more probability of reaching university level than a young person from a rural locality. If we focus on the variable of family income, the most privileged young people have 260% more probability of finishing higher secondary education than the most disadvantaged; and young people over 15 from the highest incomes have between 400% and 500% more probability of reaching university level than those from the lowest (COLMEX, 2018: 33-41).

In short, young people like Gustavo have to deal with a lack of resources in order to stay at school and complete their educational stages successfully. If they don't, they become representative of the broad grouping of trajectories of school leaving out of a need to work (Saraví, 2015). What is more, young people such as Gustavo, like his parents, trust that education can lead to a good job; they perceive that letting education fall to the wayside will mean a reduction in their ability to face the threats derived from mobility and social-economic crises (Cutter, 2003; Kim & Bostwick, 2020). Finally, despite the trust that Gustavo places in education, this research points to the reproduction of the precarious conditions of origin and, consequently, to social and economic vulnerability in the school-to-work transition.

4.2. Disadvantaged mobilities in the school-to-work transition. The case of Diana

As she has been doing for the past year, Diana gets into a shared taxi at 6 in the morning to start on the road that takes her from her home in the municipality of Teotihuacán (State of Mexico) to the university centre where she studies for her law

degree. The total journey takes approximately two hours. From her home she also often takes one of the small lorries (“combis”) that circulate from sunrise and connect the northwest and centre of the State of Mexico with Mexico City. Whatever she chooses, like many other passengers Diana takes advantage of the journey to sleep or eat the breakfast she has prepared at home. As well, Diana finishes the exercises she has left for the first class and begins to read for the second. In the last part of the journey, she gets herself ready, she puts make up on and, before arriving, she changes her trainers for shoes. She arrives just in time for the first class which begins at 8 in the morning.

The day that we accompany her, Diana has several classes that finish at about 2 in the afternoon, the time at which she begins the return journey on a route similar to the one she went on. During the journey, she buys something to eat. This time she goes directly to the centre of Teotihuacán to start her present job. Her role there is as an attendant in a clothes shop from 4 to 8 in the evening. Diana gets home a little before 9 at night, to have dinner with her family and do a school task for the following day.

Diana’s father works in a paper factory. Before that, more than twenty years ago, he worked in agriculture in his locality, an activity that he left due to the little income that it generated. Her mother works by selling clothes by catalogue and selling beauty products. Her family is made up of two younger siblings, a boy of 15 and a girl of 12, who are also students. Like many young people of her region, Diana combines her university studies with some paid work that generates enough income for her to cover the expenses of access to the higher education level (Saraví, 2015). This is how Diana narrates the journey and the way she has had to negotiate her access to university education:

Until secondary school I studied everything here [municipality of residence], so that I did not need to take any transport to get there, but when I wanted to study at the university here in Teotihuacán, I had problems getting in and I only got a place in Zumpango [...] Then, my family said that they would support me with some things but, if I wanted to study, then I had to work in something to cover the journeys at least [...] normally I spend some \$100 pesos⁴ every day on journeys and food, as I am out all day. So I hardly cover that with what I earn at the shop. Additionally, although my family pays the university fees (\$4000 to \$8000 annually), I don’t have enough to pay for other things that they ask of you to study (study guides, books, materials).

Diana’s case is representative of the statistics on mobility and education that characterise the State of Mexico, where there are a significant number of educational centres. However, these are located in the municipal capitals, mainly in the urbanised localities or small towns of the region. Thus, 95.07% of people over 3 who attend school have to travel daily by public or private transport (COESPO, 2017). This transit implies an important investment of time, meaning that constant mobility weakens the acquisition of abilities and tools with which to face threats and intensifies the generating and consolidation of vulnerabilities (Bergstrand et al.,

⁴ During the research, one United States Dollar was equal to between 15 and 20 Mexican Pesos.

2015). Diana's story, like that of many young people who travel daily in the face of the need to study and/or work, generates experiences which leads them to make the conditions they face each day to get educated seem natural, and, in this way, reduce their aspirations and expectations to achieving a "good" job, that is, one that allows them to build a family and reach the necessary levels of consumption:

At the beginning it took a lot from me [effort], above all when I had to get up early to start at 7 but it is something you get used to [...] normally I can take an hour and a half or almost two to get to the university, but I can take advantage of that travel time to study or finish some task, or sleep a little if I hadn't been able to sleep the night before [...] at work I can hardly study, as I have to attend to people and I hardly have time, I prefer to get home and study there or even take advantage of the time I take to get there [university] to do it on the road [...] Next semester I hope to organise my change, as I started recently I wasn't able to, here [university centre in Teotihuacán] they also have law, that way I wouldn't spend so much or could even not work every day besides [which] it is more and more dangerous, because people board in order to steal in the mornings, they already took my cell phone, and I was alright, but at the end of the day it's part of going back and forth to study.

For the great majority of people who live in rural spaces in Mexico, without access to roads and significant means of transport, gaps of inequality are generated that derive from the investment of time and the increase in travel expenses, mainly on public transport. Only in the region at the centre of the country, the daily average of travel between rural spaces and towns is 48 minutes, which tends to increase when the journey is from one municipality to another, which can rise to 73 minutes (Suárez & Delgado, 2015). On a national level, it has been calculated that the expense incurred on transport alone represents 19% of total household expenses, which is equivalent to an average of \$1815 monthly (IMCO, 2019). However, whilst the least advantaged families spend 13.4% of their income on transport, the better off spend 5.4% (Suárez & Delgado, 2015). This data confirms the interpretations gathered by Rubio (2010) for Mexican rural areas: precariousness occurs from job instability, wage insufficiency and the worst work conditions, to the threat of insecurity which goes alongside mobility.

On this point, the school-to-work transition of Gustavo and Diana should be taken as paradigmatic of the rural youth of central Mexico: they grow up with an intense geographical mobility, recurrent changes of schools and jumps from one kind of school modality to another, constant interruptions and permanent rearrangements to combine studies with precarious jobs and endless unforeseen elements which makes this population, amongst other things, vulnerable in the face of difficulties (Alwang et al., 2001), socially differentiated (Saraví, 2015) and weak in the acquisition of their skills (Cutter, 2003).

4.3. The school-to-work transition, a cumulation of precariousness and vulnerability. The case of Itzel

Before 8 in the morning, Itzel is already waiting opposite her community parish church for the transport vans that go towards the municipal capital of

Otumba, 15 km away. On arriving, she walks another 20 minutes by road towards Tlaxuchilco, where she studies the second semester of preparatory education from 9 till 1pm. After classes, she returns to the capital to take another transport van and travel 20km, to her job in the centre of Teotihuacán. There, Itzel goes first to the market, where a stallholder has put her aside a bag with 5 kg of potatoes. After, she goes towards a shop near the main square where, as well as changing her school uniform for normal clothes, she takes out a small metal cart, in which she prepares and sells chips three or four times a week. If she does not have too much work or some school task, she sets up in a street where her family pays the townhall for a sales “licence”. Whilst this is her main “job”, two days a week she also “helps” her mother on another street stall selling foods for fast preparation. Once set up in the street, she puts some potatoes in a bucket with water and salt. Then she arranges a small structure inside the cart which acts as a “counter” and begins to light a stove connected to a small gas tank of 10 kg. Inside a metal pan of approximately 60 cm, she empties four or five litres of oil and, when it heats up, she begins to peel potatoes. It’s an activity that she “likes” doing, since, although “you don’t earn much” (from \$150 to \$400 per day), it is something that is “more or less secure”. The only thing that “bothers” her are the scars she has got from “the cuts and burns from the oil” and that at times she has to be standing up “for a long time” (5-6 hours) under the sun. Then, if she has sold enough, Itzel retires at approximately 7 in the afternoon. If sales weren’t good, she waits a couple more hours. As Saturday is the day with most visits to Teotihuacán, she works from 1 to 9 at night and on Sunday from 10 until around 2 in the afternoon. The day that we accompanied her she did not sell much, but she still had to finish a school task for the following day so, before 8 in the evening, she put everything away and went to put the cart away. Finally, she took a van again that was leaving directly for her community of residence.

Itzel is 17 and she is the youngest of three siblings. Her father works in construction and has a piece of land given over to growing barley. Her mother sells food. Itzel, like many young people of her community of origin, started on her road to work by helping her family, although she did not receive any payment until she reached secondary school:

I already worked before, well, they gave me things to do, but they didn’t pay me [...] I began with my parents, I helped my mum there at the stall [selling food] and my father then asked me to feed the animals and so on [...] I started secondary school and then my mum told me that, to help me with my things, she was going to give me something for my help [...] the first thing I used what they paid me for was to pay for some notebooks and things that a friend took to school, my mum told me that was a good idea [to sell notebooks at school], so she lent me money to buy some and that is how I began.

In Itzel’s daily activities we find all the categories that define the conditions of work precariousness described by Rubio (2010), to which can be added interruption, neglect and abandonment in her educational trajectory. Itzel’s school-to-work transition shows how education comes to represent one more activity amongst others that exists alongside paid jobs and help for exhausted family

economies, in a generalised framework of discarding and abandonment that do not maintain it as a priority (González-Fuente et al., 2018). Finally, the school-to-work transition of Gustavo, Diana and Itzel is characterised by intermittency, the temptation to abandon studies, and the weakness of their educational trajectories, subordinated in most cases to paid activities. Without a doubt, work priorities mark the school-to-work transition of rural youth and they do so in a context in which the family is the main socialising agent of survival strategies.

In this context, the cases presented stand out due to two kinds of arguments. Firstly, the intersection and accumulation of precariousness within the family allows us to present the school-to-work transition of these young people as highly vulnerable in the sense named by Alwang, Siegel y Jorgensen (2001): in a framework of precariousness, the ways of dealing with social-economic deprivation -including daily mobility- produce a stagnation of previous precarious conditions and heighten their consequences (Santamaría, 2012: 132). On the other hand, this finding permits a critical analysis of precisely what the role of school is in the school-to-work transition. At least in this research, it is evident how, in contexts of great precariousness and vulnerability, the role of school is significantly reduced when it comes to providing opportunities and/or tools in accessing paid work. On the contrary, this role is taken on by the domestic unit, an issue where it is vital to understand, amongst other issues, the strategies associated with mobility and the very same reproduction of the precarious conditions of the family of origin in new generations.

5. Conclusions

Based on the practices and stories of rural young people, men and women who live in the centre of Mexico in conditions of social and economic vulnerability, this study has attempted to identify and interpret the patterns of geographical mobility in the school-to-work transition. In this way, the daily movements of these subjects allow us to observe elements that go beyond the length of time a journey takes or the cost of the transport used, given that the organization of the journey and the arrival at the destination are part of the experience of mobility. The daily trajectories of the young people reflect the existence of spaces and movements that reproduce the structurally precarious conditions of the rural population. In other words, mobility allows us to understand that individual expectations and aspirations are modelled by social factors that augment the accumulation of different disadvantages.

In this article we have focused on the practices of rural young people who, of necessity and constantly, need to mobilise in search of educational and work spaces, as a characteristic of the so-called school-to-work transition. From the point of view of social-educational research, this implies the need to take daily journeys into account when it comes to analysing the educational-work transitions of subjects with unequal social-economic, social-spatial and social-cultural standing. In accordance with this, by way of research results, we briefly summarise the two main arguments of the discussion.

In the first place, we have opted for a dialectical theoretical presentation of the concepts of “precariousness” and “vulnerability” in the sense that the conditions of precariousness lead very significantly to situations of high vulnerability (Bergstrand et al., 2015). This is inescapably linked to the strategies of social reproduction that arise within domestic units and which are socialised by new generations; the necessary choice of paid activities that are various and distant, together with, amongst other factors, the consequent early abandonment of education, prolonged school failure (continuously failing marks in the majority of subjects and repeating school years) and lack of continuity at school (with recurrent leavings and re-entering of centres and modalities of study), constitute an accumulative trajectory of disadvantages that are learned and socialized in the home of origin. It can be observed in particular that young women accumulate greater disadvantages than their male peers in the way that they have to fulfil certain expectations linked to traditional roles such as a greater burden of the unpaid domestic work in their own home; caring tasks for dependants (children, old people, sick people); personal transitions marked by pregnancies and/or early pairings; working conditions with lower salaries or more undervalued work; an association of work with spheres represented as female (cleaning, care, textile, care of small businesses, etc.); and mobility itself which means greater risks and dangers (Lindón, 2020; Rubio, 2010).

In second place, intense daily mobility makes up a very significant part of the survival strategies of domestic units. On the one hand, journeys are an intrinsic part of the search for school spaces and, above all, jobs that provide monetary income to the nuclear family of origin, all in a context of repeated interruptions and permanent reorganizing to be able to combine studies with other occupations, concerns and the unforeseen (Lindón, 2020). On the other hand, mobility in itself constitutes an indicator of class which positions rural youth as a highly vulnerable group: their travel times are of relative and absolute long duration; the option of private transport is practically discarded from the moment that the majority of young people interviewed use means of public transport that is low-cost and low-quality; their exposure to environments of violence, insecurity and criminal relationships is ever greater; in sum, mobilities are inherent to the positioning of young people in disadvantaged situations which are reproduced and growing on a daily basis.

Finally, this present analysis of school-work journeys in contexts of high vulnerability as described for the rural centre of Mexico shares the point of view that any approach to the conceptualisation of inequality in mobility in the school-to-work transition must consider both individual attributes (income, family capital, gender, ethnic origin, functional diversity, etc.) as well as specific spatial conditions and social-cultural contexts (Hidayati et al., 2021). In terms of public policy, on the one hand, a strategy of state investment in the improvement of terrestrial communication infrastructures and public transport must prioritise the vulnerable population (Le Gallo et al., 2017); on the other, the preference of young people for paid work over school makes it very difficult to intervene through programmes, amongst others, of school support or prevention of absenteeism. In any case, the reduction of social-educational and social-spatial inequality involves designing and implementing territorial environments for the whole of the population, based on the

preponderance of the public, the recognition of young people as a heterogeneous and diverse group and the redistribution of resources and opportunities (Farrugia, 2015; Saraví, 2015).

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