

Child and Adolescent Labor in Non-Wage Societies: A Sociological Perspective from Family Workshops*

[English Version]

Trabajo infantil y adolescente en sociedades no salariales.
Una lectura sociológica desde los talleres-familia

Trabalho infantil e adolescente em sociedades não salariais:
uma leitura sociológica a partir dos ateliês familiares

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Abstract

Objective: To examine the contemporary debate surrounding child and adolescent labor from two main perspectives: the protectionist and abolitionist approaches. The theoretical potential is studied to address the reality of the phenomenon in contexts where multiple conditions of precariousness prevail, and where working children can begin their process of social disaffiliation. **Methodology:** As a strategy to explore the different conceptions and expressions of the phenomenon, interviews were conducted with working children and adolescents (WCAs) from San Andrés Cuexcontitlán, a semi-urban community in Mexico where the participation of working children and adolescents in informal family

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workshops has become normalized. **Results:** The need to reconceptualize child labor was identified taking into account the probability of finding in work a social bond, an institutional support, and a possible right that is still denied to children and adolescents interested in participating legitimately and with dignity in labor and productive activities. **Conclusions:** In non-wage societies, child labor is not only a technical relationship of production, it serves as a key institutional mechanism for integration into the social structure.

Keywords: child labor; informal work; workshop; family; social structure (obtained from the UNESCO thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: abordar la polémica contemporánea entre las concepciones del trabajo infantil y adolescente desde dos principales enfoques: proteccionista y abolicionista. Se indaga su potencialidad teórica para abordar la realidad que presenta el fenómeno en contextos donde prevalecen múltiples condiciones de precarización, y donde la niñez trabajadora puede comenzar su proceso de desafiliación social. **Metodología:** como estrategia para explorar las diferentes concepciones y expresiones del fenómeno, se realizaron entrevistas con niños, niñas y adolescentes (NNA) trabajadores de San Andrés Cuexcontitlán, una comunidad semi urbana en México donde se ha normalizado la presencia de NNA trabajadores en talleres familiares, caracterizados por la informalidad. **Resultados:** se logra identificar la necesidad de reconceptualizar al trabajo infantil, tomando en cuenta la probabilidad de encontrar en el trabajo un vínculo social, un soporte institucional y un posible derecho que se les sigue negando a los NNA interesados en involucrarse legítima y dignamente en las dinámicas laborales y/o productivas. **Conclusiones:** en sociedades no salariales, el trabajo infantil no es solamente una relación técnica de producción, es un soporte institucional privilegiado de inscripción en la estructura social.

Palabras clave: trabajo infantil; trabajo informal; taller; familia; estructura social (obtenidos del tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: abordar a controvérsia contemporânea entre as concepções do trabalho infantil e adolescente a partir de duas perspectivas principais: a protecionista e a abolicionista. Investiga-se seu potencial teórico para compreender a realidade

apresentada por esse fenômeno em contextos marcados por múltiplas condições de precarização, nos quais crianças e adolescentes trabalhadores podem iniciar processos de desfiliação social. **Metodologia:** como estratégia para explorar as diferentes concepções e manifestações do fenômeno, foram realizadas entrevistas com crianças e adolescentes trabalhadores de San Andrés Cuexcontitlán, uma comunidade semiurbana do México onde a presença de crianças e adolescentes em oficinas familiares, caracterizadas pela informalidade, tornou-se socialmente naturalizada. **Resultados:** identificou-se a necessidade de reconceituar o trabalho infantil, levando em consideração a possibilidade de encontrar no trabalho um vínculo social, um suporte institucional e um possível direito que continua sendo negado às crianças e aos adolescentes interessados em participar de forma legítima e digna das dinâmicas laborais e/ou produtivas. **Conclusões:** em sociedades não salariais, o trabalho infantil não constitui apenas uma relação técnica de produção; trata-se de um suporte institucional privilegiado de inserção na estrutura social.

Palavras chaves: trabalho infantil; trabalho informal; oficina; família; estrutura social (obtidas do Tesouro da UNESCO).

Introduction

Child labor can be examined from different theoretical perspectives, leading to diverse interpretations of the phenomenon. The main one remains its conception as a "symptom of poverty" (sometimes extreme) suffered by households. It is a predominantly economic interpretation, still in the social imaginary as the only or, hierarchically, the most important one. A related body of research conceptualizes child labor as a survival strategy by families or by working children and adolescents (WCAs) living under conditions of vulnerability. It is an example of an answer to the classic question about how the marginalized survive.

Another approach focuses on the consequence of meritocratic ideology in which one must know how to earn a living from an early age, learn to do things in a technical-practical sense as a way of training for adult life, to be responsible and feel satisfied of knowing and earning money, and even a character from face-to-face confrontation with life. There is also a perspective that identifies child labor as a common practice, rooted in families, where everyone participates in tasks and expenses to the extent of their possibilities. In other words, it is not conceived as something extraordinary that must be repaired, since it is practically an almost necessary (and desired) process that every person goes through in their childhood and adolescence. However, in recent decades, an approach has emerged from the children's own voices, in which they claim as a right to be inserted into the labor market if they wish, also protected by their recognition as subjects of rights, with the capacity for discernment and decision making. This perspective not only challenges adult-centered and abolitionist views, it also resists in a country like Mexico where, in the absence of a full wage society, the connection between formal work and the social State is weak. For this reason, institutional support relies heavily on community-based institutions of a community nature.

This paper proposes a conception of child and adolescent labor from a protectionist approach that explores its definition as an institutional anchor in social disaffiliation. A reconceptualization of child labor bases on experiences of the social protagonists. This assumes a critical view of work, named as "informal", especially in community and family contexts.

The Debate on Child and Youth Labor

Within the perceptions around the work carried out by children (boys, girls and adolescents) there are two main considerations. As an unwanted phenomenon, literally as a public problem worthy of being treated for its reduction and, in the future, eradication. And a certain positive meaning, either because it is expected or because it is desired or searched, in which the phenomenon is accepted as that, a phenomenon typical of the social dynamics that we have built and legitimized.

For the purposes of this paper, child labor is conceived as a socio-institutional support of children and adolescents to the social structure with the logical intention of reinforcing their social ties or supplying them to the probable weakening of their family and/or school ties.

Abolitionist Approach

Traditional definitions of “child labor” describe it mostly as the participation of children in economic activities prohibited by law (UNICEF, 2006). It is classified as forms of work prohibited because they endanger children's physical integrity (ILO, 2010). They show a bias towards the pathological conception of the phenomenon and, thus, choose its eradication.

The abolitionist approach (Leyra, 2005) defines child labor as a totally harmful practice since, according to its perception, violates the rights protected in *the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, under the argument that it negatively affects education, health, and occupational and personal safety of children and adolescents.

Child labor raises legitimate concerns, not only in recent years, as Ranjan and Lancaster (2005) state, but throughout history and mainly from local and international institutional development. This concern mainly deals with the conviction of child labor from those definitions:

It is harmful to the development of human capital, an idea that thrives in increasingly several research of this issue. Kanbargi and Kulkarni (1991), Psacharopoulos (1997), Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1997), Jensen and Nielsen (1997), Ravallion and Wodon (2000) and Ray (2000a, 2000b and 2002) are part of this wide bibliography that demonstrates the correlation between child labor and children's schooling. (Ranjan & Lancaster, 2005, p. 209).

The relationship between poverty and child labor within these approaches is fundamental to explain the phenomenon and associate it with the real need that it is a symptom and consequence of poverty itself. Therefore, the treatment is necessary from the perspective of eradication.

According to the orthodox view, minors enter the labor market when the income they receive is necessary to guarantee the minimum level of family consumption (Ilahi, Orazem & Sedlack, 2001; Rogers and Swinnerton, 2004; Kambhampati and Rajan, 2005; Fan, 2011); this hypothesis is known as the *luxury axiom* of child labor. (Cortés *et al.*, 2018, p. 136).

Under this approach, there is a threshold income level below which parents are likely to send their children to work. This is how child labor is related to characteristics of vulnerability in households, and even to deficiencies within the same population of children and adolescents.

The abolitionist approach includes studies where child labor is conceived as a strategy of households to meet their needs for low income of the heads of the household, or informal employment or unemployment.

Parikh and Sadoulet (2005) state that children whose parents are self-employed are more likely to work than children of employees. Edmonds (2007) and Reggio (2011) found that daughters of employed mothers are more likely to work at home when there are young children at home. A similar result stated by Ilahi (2001), shows that changes in the socioeconomic situation of the family affect the probability of work outside the home more than that of girls, and that the trend is reversed in household. (Cortés *et al.*, 2018, p. 137).

Ureña *et al.* (2009), aimed at determining the impact of poverty on schooling and child labor and found that poverty stimulates the labor participation of children, and reduces their chances of going to school. The higher the schooling of parents, the less likely children and adolescents are to work and the more likely to attend school. Child labor is not only related to household poverty and its survival dynamics; it is also related to schooling. There are rates of absenteeism as a result of work in minors, and low academic performance, and, in extreme cases, school dropout. This often results from the excessive time demands imposed by work activities, or the absence of minimal academic preparation, as a result of a lack of time, resources and attention of parents (workers or not), and a very early incursion of children and adolescents themselves into productive activities.

These research works have contributed to strengthening the traditional view of child labor as a public problem, rather than as a social phenomenon. This perspective has historically been legitimized, without contradicting the social stigma to which working children are subjected, nor with the recurrent discourses of awareness and promises to eradicate their practice.

Protectionist Approach

There is a duality about child labor, or at least a flexible view, in the way child labor is conceived within the family. This duality requires going beyond conceptions that only show one side of the phenomenon. The reality experienced by many children and adolescents in Mexico and in the world, demands rethinking the conception of child labor, even to its probable definitions as a regular practice, and identifying that the problem lies not in this practice but in the constant degrees of exploitation (De la Vega, 1996) or abuse.

The so-called protectionist approach (Leyra, 2005) is based on a critical assessment of child labor. It emphasizes the potentially positive dimensions of child labor as a way to enhance experience within the labor market to make it a comprehensive part of a socializing and training process. By doing so, child labor can go from being a reason for disaffiliation, or social exclusion in extreme cases, to a cause for strengthening family and social ties. This paper explores this conception through an analysis of the family, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts that influence children's decisions to enter the labor market before reaching the legal working age.

Contexts are essential when analyzing child labor and several factors that trigger it and its consequences. The so-called “structural issues” are often ignored when establishing correlations of the phenomenon, such as low income problems, labor abuses or the low academic performance of children and adolescents.

Child labor affects the dynamics of the families in different ways, and mainly on children and adolescents. The findings around the subject are relevant to education; however, it is essential to explore recent research about other elements that do not necessarily fit into the pathological view of child labor.

Despite the evidence that favors the *luxury axiom*¹, recent studies have found an inverted U relationship between land tenure and child labor (Bhalotra and Heady,

¹ Hypothesis within child labor that states that minors enter the labor market when the income they receive is necessary to guarantee the minimum level of family consumption.

2003; Basu *et al.*, 2010). This relationship is called the "wealth paradox", because it disputes the hypothesis of poverty as the only determinant of the insertion of minors into the labor market. To understand such a paradox [...] Fan (2011) states that when the wages of adults guarantee the subsistence consumption of the household, the substitutability between children labor and adults can matter much more than the income of the parents in the decision of participation of minors in the labor market. Even, Fan (2011), suggests a higher rate of return on investment in the child's education may increase the parents' incentive to make child work, since child labor increases household income and, therefore, financial resources for the child's education; for this reason, the new approaches include variables associated with the sociocultural acceptance of CL, the limitations of credit markets, displacement and the impacts of state transfer programs that seek to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon (Acedo *et al.*, 2011a), (Cortés *et al.*, 2018, p. 140).

Child labor, not as a problem, but as a part of a cultural tradition, includes certain differences of roles to men and women within work dynamics.

Blunch and Verner (2001) state that there is a marked gender difference in child labor, since girls are more likely than boys to engage in risky work. But this gender gap is not due to discrimination in the labor market, but reflects the cultural norms of certain societies. Del Rio and Cumsille (2008) show that, while poverty establishes the most robust determinant of child labor, the cultural preferences of parents become increasingly relevant in the decision. In Colombia, Gil (2006) finds that within the cultural dynamics of certain social groups (such as peasants and people with low schooling), work is attributed a formative function; hence, the collective imagination sees an effective way to prevent minors from falling into bad habits and to promote the development of work skills and abilities for their adulthood. (Cortés *et al.*, 2018, p. 140).

Families, motivated by a variety of factors—not necessarily survival—resort to child labor to sustain their own dynamics or even to promote values and expand not only their economic, but also their cultural capital.

Edmonds and Turk (2003), based on information from Vietnam, found that households with their own business are more likely to send their children to work. A family that owns their property or business has a greater opportunity to use the children's labor. Bhalotra and Heady (2003), research on Ghana and Pakistan, stated that property is positively related to child labor. As large properties imply

greater wealth, in this case poverty does not lead to a higher level of child labor. (Mazzarella, 2013, p. 53).

These approaches are not only the result of theoretical efforts by researchers, but also of the movements of child workers (WCM) who have raised their voices to claim new considerations. They demand greater participation and prominence in their own lives. These voices do not speak about child labor itself (Leyra, 2005), but the conditions in which children and adolescents carry out such work, allow the exploration of other ways of understanding, defining and intervening in child labor.

From the protectionist perspective, the main issue lies on social inequalities. However, it is necessary to consider the continuums of inequality-violence that mark children and adolescents in broad regions such as Latin America; social contexts in which both conditions work as a system of mutual involvement. In these cases, this reality explains, in a systemic way, the deterioration of the institutional anchors of the most unprotected; at the same time, it generates a series of asymmetric social and economic relationships, not only between social classes, but also between age groups and sexual diversities.

Although, the continuums of inequality-violence affect the reproduction of ways of economic precariousness or economic exploitation, one of its most disturbing effects is the destruction of social cohesion. That is, the replacement of systems of solidarity social relations by asymmetric systems of power, which tend to reproduce and perpetuate the same systems of inequality-violence (Arzate, 2023).

Institutional Supports and Child and Adolescent Labor

The base of the argument for this paper is what Robert Castel calls the new social question: what to do to reintegrate populations marginalized by social and economic circumstances into social life and put an end to a hemorrhage of social disaffiliation? (Castel, 1997). The author places work as that social question, since modern societies have been historically structured around work. In other words, work is an economic reference, and also a psychological, cultural and symbolically dominant reference in the modern world. It is the main mechanism that structures society, especially formal work, understood as a fundamental connection between the individual and the State. The wage society represents the most finished result of this historical process.

In certain contexts, work is a socio-institutional support for all age groups. Child labor is shown as a possibility to reinforce the connections of children and

adolescents with the family, the community or the school itself, or, in extreme cases, to supply some of those links.

The concept of ‘modern social bond’ connects directly with that of ‘social cohesion’. According to Arzate (2021), it should be understood as a theory of social action, since it starts from an identity and a morality that allows producing social organization around the common good. For Durkheim (cited by Múgica, 2004), it is not possible to generate a cohesive society without conscious individual and collective action based on the autonomy of individuals that makes it possible. This conception leads what is meant by institutional ways that works as anchors of individuals in the modern world, regardless of the level of development of a society. Institutional anchoring is nothing more than the result of a collective action based on that conscious morality around the common good, even beyond the mere economic rationality that usually guides institutions.

The connections of individual and the modern social structure —based mainly on implicit organic solidarity— allow both the construction of social cohesion and the prevention of social exclusion. To demonstrate this, three areas of integration proposed by Castel (1997) describe the process of social disaffiliation: integration, vulnerability and disaffiliation. Within this framework, a first conclusion is drawn: individuals can hardly live without social support because that condition would make them excluded.

What is the socio-institutional support for children and adolescents? The quick answer is family. The family is the primary institution through which children become integrated into social life, and also the one who protects them; that is, they are a bond and support at the same time, there the first socialization takes place. The second bond is education and school. The first as an institutional value to strengthen their anchoring in the capitalist dynamics of society, and the second where they can weave friendly relationships with some of their peers to move towards total integration. If both bonds exist and are maintained, the child is likely to be within the first place under a safe and stable environment.

There are possibilities due to several situations in their households —as National Survey of Child Labor (INEGI, 2022) states— minors will see weakened one of these main supports, or in the worst case, they will see both. When this happens, one of the strategies of families and children and adolescents themselves to make up for such weakening is to work. If the socio-family context requires children and adolescents to work, they will do so without problems, which further reinforces the behavior if there are those who preceded them in that practice or have examples of their peers involved in work dynamics.

These actions are strategic, especially to avoid social exclusion, since, in certain social situations, the home and the family are not enough to fully sustain the connection with the social structure. Moreover, there are wide forms of violence in families and neighborhoods in extreme poverty, especially in the cities of Latin America; violence that mainly affects girls, adolescents and sexual diversities.

However, children and adolescents face a regulatory impediment that banned them from working before the age of 15. In the areas of disaffiliation, their insertion in labor market places them, at least in theory, in an area of vulnerability, since they are located in an environment of fragility of job insecurity and in the deterioration of their social relationships.

Child labor that includes working children and adolescents represents one of the social phenomena that most challenges social sensitivity. Their condition of vulnerability can place them in a process of social disaffiliation and, consequently, as potential recipients of social assistance, which Castel (1997) refers to protecting the person in danger of social distancing and unable to meet their needs by themselves. In this framework, a social intervention of a charitable or welfare nature is prioritized before a socio-political intervention. The latter is associated with the process of modernity of the development of critical thinking, democratic practice, the consequences of the industrial revolution and the growing secularization of Western culture (Saavedra, 2015). In other words, it is an intervention contextualized to capitalist dynamics, which also distances itself from the strategies of the welfare model.

Manfred Liebel and Child Citizenship

The intention to incorporate the term "child citizenship" into the debate is the construction of the set of rights of children and adolescents; among them the right to work as a way to fully realize.

If the work is registered as an institutional support of children and adolescents to reverse a process of disaffiliation or avoid total exclusion, it is a must to be recognized as a right, which can be justified within a new paradigm of childhood. Manfred Liebel is one of the pioneering authors in theoretically constructing this prerogative for children and adolescents. The right of children and adolescents to work does not refer to any work, but to "work with dignity", to "[...] light and not very heavy work, to an activity according to their skills and abilities" (Liebel, 2012, p. 19). Working children and adolescents do not accept being excluded from the social practice of work that for adults is a sign of a dignified life, solely on the grounds of their young age (Liebel, 2012). The

claim is a recognition as subjects of rights, as protagonists of the world and of their own life, without their age condition limiting them in that sense, as adultcentrism states.

To keep the adult working world closed to children is to reproduce the ideology of a group of weak and immature people who need to be protected for their healthy future development, an assumption that, articulated to chauvinism, racism and social classes, ways a constellation of power that reproduces social exclusion. (Leyva & Pichardo, 2016, p. 80).

Manfred Liebel focuses the theoretical approach on the subject to place the working child as the center of reflections and protagonist of their own lives. This author criticizes "[...] the idea inherent in the bourgeois pattern of childhood that being a child and working are mutually exclusive, or that they can only form a union that is harmful to children" (Liebel, 2006, p. 11). One approach to capture these realities is that proposed by James and Prout (cited by Liebel, 2012), through the definition of the child as subjects able of interpreting their realities and acting consciously. In this framework, childhood is considered not only as a "[...] temporary space in personal development, but also as a social space co-constructed by the same children and developing in historically and culturally different contexts" (James *et al.* cited by Liebel, 2006, p. 203).

The proposal implies being aware that a child worker is mainly a social subject: a member of society that contributes to its own configuration and that has the capacity of agency. This aspect is key, since their opinions and points of view will be influenced by that same society, while facing structural, cultural and social limitations. Here lies the core of the approach, recognizing these limitations and how they can possibly be overcome. It is about understanding how children and adolescents place themselves before these limitations, because in this way work can mean a position before the situations that they themselves observe and perceive.

Manfred Liebel's approach helps us better to understand child labor as a key institutional mechanism for integration into the social structure. It is not only significant for adults, but also for minors, especially when they face situations where their more traditional social ties are threatened, as they react by linking themselves again to society through work.

If work is understood as a solution to those motivations, it would not be congruent to eliminate that possibility they have found as a way of life. Many times, work is used by minors or by the same families to compensate for the inequality of opportunities (*ex before*), and to be matched in that equality (*ex after*).

This is part of the effort to overcome the circumstances in which they were born and live (family, region, income, level of resources of a household).

One of the empirical research lines is the identification of several motivations of children and adolescents to insert themselves into child labor. These do not necessarily correspond to the negative and pathological perspective with which the phenomenon has traditionally been approached. The fact that child and adolescent labor is a constant practice throughout the world and that, in the Latin American, it has a significant presence in almost all the countries.

Informality and Family Work as a Contingent Social Action: The Emergence of Family Workshop

During the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, child and adolescent labor has been a reality of Mexican labor market. This is explained by high percentages of informality: for the first quarter of 2023, the Informality Rate, according to the National Survey of Occupation and Employment, was 55.1%. More than half of the economically active employed population worked without an employment contract, therefore, they are workers disaffiliated with the State health services and social security that shows situations of job insecurity. Even in formal work, there are serious processes of precariousness, specially for different neoliberal reforms that ended up undermining workers' rights, especially wage precariousness, associated with the containment of wages as a State policy.

This reality leads to the proposition that Mexico is a non-wage society. This has many problems in social reproduction. First, as a non-wage society, formal and informal work do not represent a powerful institutional and legal anchor to the welfare system that the State and the market propose, and Mexican welfare system is permeable in its processes of social inclusion. Secondly, the system of needs of a family with lack or poverty implies the resolution of such deficiencies through a contingent response. This generates several strategies for the creation of hybrid institutions between work and family that allow avoiding economic precariousness. In this way, different informal family-work arrangements emerge that, in practice, work well as effective institutional anchors.

At least from a sociological perspective, the important thing is not their organization of work or social division of labor, but the new configurations for production from a community/family logic. The way in which the organization of work responds to: i) the satisfaction of the system of needs, while, ii) the productive configurations to be strongly interwoven in the community and

the family are sustained by imaginary meanings around identity, the value of solidarity work and the need for a morality of autonomous survival.

Economic informality results in multiple work scenarios, ranging from street work to domestic micro-workshops. The latter have been the spaces where children and adolescents work frequently. Such dynamics occur in configurations of work spaces that respond to the contextual, historical-social and cultural reality of the different populations in the territory, and that are also the result of complex processes of creating communities and families.

In almost all of the country, many industries have emerged and consolidated where work in informal family microenterprises constitutes the backbone of production, and where child and adolescent labor is standardized. For example, in the State of Mexico, mostly in Valle de Toluca, from the 1970s to now, food processing, *textile maquiladora*, and handicraft industries have emerged, among others. The emergence of these industries responds to the radical changes in the social structure, that is, to the productive transformation of peasant economies towards service and industrial economies (Arzate, 2011).

The economic structural change and its correlation in the social structure in Mexico in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries —which meant moving from being an agricultural country to an urban and industrialized one— widely explains different ways of social inequality and new areas of disaffiliation for the most vulnerable. These processes that trigger social change are the real scenario under which communities and families produce hybrid economic institutions, which works as containment zones in disaffiliation and external processes of capitalist exploitation; these are economic-social formations that can be referred to as "family workshop".

The "family workshop", as a hybrid capitalist institution, but which works under a logic of reproduction of family-type life, uses informality as a strategy of invisibility to the State and the market. This allows to survive against formalized capitalism. In this way, it adapts to capitalism based on subsistence strategies constructed from specific cultural identities.

An example of this is the town of San Andrés Cuexcontitlán, a community of the municipality of Toluca, still identified as a socioeconomically vulnerable area with a high presence of indigenous population. The intention to place the case study there for this research has to do with the validity and constant reproduction of the phenomenon of child labor within its productive and cultural dynamics. The resin and ceramic art workshops are places where children and their families have found a way to reproduce the ways of life, the trades and preserve the identity, the sustenance and even the anchorage to the social structure within the community and the municipality itself.

The resin art workshops in San Andrés Cuexcontitlán have a date that goes back to its origins as a community, and child labor within its productive dynamics. The learning process in the art craft can hardly be understood without resorting to the teaching of this way an early age, especially intergenerational within the families themselves. Therefore, the normalization of child labor within these workshops has been a constant, with the opposite cases (people learning the trade until youth or adulthood) being the least.

To approach the working children of the community and, considering the possibilities of sampling in qualitative research, an intentional or strategic sampling was carried out. This consists of the deliberate selection of environments and people with a wealth of relevant information in relation to the objectives. The particularly knowledgeable participants have a lot of information, since they have a broader understanding of the scenario; they can narrate the history of the institution or the population, and complete researcher's knowledge (Sánchez, 2013). These were the main criteria for the selection of the interviewees:

- a) Children and adolescents engaged in labor activities
- b) Possibility of access to their environments
- c) Availability of participation and information
- d) Relationship with working children and adolescents
- e) Assistant authorities informed about the phenomenon

Twenty-six semi-structured interviews were carried out among child and adolescent workers, parents and employers. The questions were intended to get information to understand the meanings and conceptions of the interviewees around child labor, considering their subjective perspectives and exploring where they get information through which they construct their meanings.

Perceptions of Child Labor

In the resin workshops, remnants of an inherited dynamic are observed to achieve the permanence through the teaching of children and adolescents. However, these practices coexist with new dynamics in which dedication is no longer exclusive to work, but alternates with schooling and even with the

incursion into other tasks or professions. Fortunately, the new paradigm around children and adolescents has permeated many of the activities in which they are involved, and in different regions. Within this context, children and adolescents labor is framed in craft workshops of San Andres Cuexcontitlán where different positions coexist: those that propose to move them away from these places and those that consider their participation relevant to promote their development. The position that understands this experience as an opportunity for children and adolescents to develop skills and attitudes necessary for life is recognized, and the contribution to the continuity of a labor with which the community and its inhabitants have historically identified.

To know the work means being able to defend oneself, if needed, from labor exclusion, poverty and vulnerability. The children and adolescents involved have the possibility of crafting if the processes of social exclusion do not allow them to continue in their formal studies.

E: Do you consider an obligation for children who work to have a complete training?

A: It is not a matter of obligation or that one by force wants them to learn this, but it is necessary that they know how to work, but imagine, what they are going to do tomorrow if they do not study or if they do not find a job from what they study, they cannot expect me to support them indefinitely. (Fieldwork in San Andrés Cuexcontitlán. Isaiah, workshop owner and employer. Personal communication, 07/10/2023).

E: Do you think that the work you do in the workshop has contributed to your development?

A: Well, it is what they have done in my family, my grandfather, they say, that I did it, and now my father too. I am learning trade there, and it feels good because it is part of what is done here also in the town [...] maybe, it depends on whether I study high school and a career or something, but it does help me, and I would like to learn crafts well, I think it is a good job. (Fieldwork in San Andrés Cuexcontitlán. Brandon, 12 years old, working child and adolescent. Personal communication, 10/10/2023).

The workshop family does not have a single organization, but multiple, each adapted to the circumstances within the community and the family in inequality-violence contexts. In doing so, children and adolescents into labor demand the coining of imaginary definitions of what childhood and youth

are, and what work means and its relationship with other life context, such as school.

This, as an institution that provides institutional anchorage to its members, it represents an economic support, but also, perhaps as important as an affective and supportive stem for inequalities and forms of violence of daily life. The workshop family is a supportive space where learning and individual arrangements of precariousness, and its ways govern their social, cultural and moral logic, without forgetting that there is always an inevitable economic end, because they must be productive and successful as capitalist companies.

In this community, although conceptions framed in the protectionist approach prevail there are also critical positions regarding child labor. However, these cannot be considered dichotomous, since the protectionist approach advocates, just critical views at the phenomenon, to consider its possible negative consequences, but not limited to them. As a result, the perspective is broadened towards those aspects that can contribute to the training of working children and adolescents, and to the positive influences in their close environments.

E: What is your opinion about the fact that children work?

A: Well, it is good that they work to support the family, although it is better that they go to school, right? I think that is better for them, and then they can work more, although knowing something else, and I do not think it will hurt them. (Fieldwork in San Andrés Cuexcontitlán. Javier, workshop owner and employer. Personal communication, 07/10/2023).

E: What is your opinion about the fact that children work?

A: Many parents of these children do their job, not because they want to get rich or something like that, they are used to working from a young age and that they inherit from their children, almost as if it were passed down genetically [...] The little children who work do it mainly to help their families, fortunately, there are no such ideas that they work because they despise what they have, moreover, I think that the fact of working in the same way as their parents is a sign that they are happy and even somewhat proud of what they are and what they have achieved with that work. (Fieldwork in San Andrés Cuexcontitlán. Karla, Community Middle School Teacher. Personal communication, 27/11/2023)

If work is identified in the community as an engine of personal development, then the strength of the phenomenon, both in force and in scale, is further

explained. Incorporation into workshops from childhood is also reasonable in helping children in their comprehensive training. Therefore, it is not just to have them apart from the workplace, on the contrary, it is sought to incorporate them to contribute to their training. The personal development of children can motivate and be an engine of family development (eventually also for the community) in keeping their traditions, the maintenance of the craft and the generation of jobs.

The effort of child and adolescents workers in the resin craft workshops is externally recognized as a sign of self-improvement, family solidarity and community identity. Internally, child and adolescents workers know that they are executors of this effort, it is a framed idea inherited generationally. They voluntarily subscribe so as not to be excluded from that recognition, it means not to do less than their parents or grandparents. The effort is necessary for the own life, beyond what it can generate in a complementary way to the basic needs and their closest satisfactions as children or adolescents.

Working children are protagonists in the generation of identity and subsistence, both at homes and workshops. Within the community, the conception of child labor impacts the decisions of children to get involved and anchored in the labor field and community dynamics as a part, participating and reproducing them.

Final Thoughts

In societies that do not conform to the full wage-labor model, work is not only a technical relationship of production, it serves as a key institutional mechanism for integration into the social structure. In this type of society, where diverse and continuous complexes of inequality-violence also coincide, as family ties are weakened or broken, the phenomenon of child labor highlights the potential fragility of the institutional supports that keep a person within the social structure. In childhood and adolescence, these supports are mainly the family and school.

The importance of protectionist approach is their recognition of right of children and adolescents to work and guaranteeing their protection both as children and workers as subjects of rights. The problem still lies in the fact that their search for inclusion through work conflicts with adult-centered prohibitive approaches. Since it is not allowed by law, child labor is characterized by its clandestinity, precariousness, injustice and, in extreme cases, quasi-slavery.

They cannot demand labor protection because they must not even work, in the end, abolitionist approaches end up making the reality of any way of child and adolescent labor invisible.

As a way of hybrid production, family workshops have been employment alternatives around the world, where children and adolescent are involved in productive activities, but at the same time, they are protected from possible violations and abuses in different contexts. The workshop guarantees the work and the protection of their integrity, it recognizes their status as children or adolescents and assign tasks appropriate to their age and physical capacities, all from a moral sense of protection of a community nature.

The work does not deny their childhood, on the contrary, it is to recognize - according to CRC- the capacities of children and adolescents in understanding and discernment. If the recognition of these abilities were to lead them away from their condition as children, an adult-centered view would be involved to overcome, at least on the theoretical approach. Thus, child citizenship is the guarantee and full exercise of the rights of children and adolescents. Citizenship is a possibility to demonstrate the capacity they have to participate in all social dynamics from a rights approach, beyond its legal dimension, it can be another way of supporting and linking to the social structure.

Family workshops as institutional arrangements of institutional anchorage in contexts of inequality-violence represents an analytical challenge to abolitionist theories. They also open a window of understanding to the survival of vulnerable populations of the dramatic and fast structural changes of capitalism in peripheral countries. These situations allow us to think, among other issues: i) the anthropo-social ways of what social cohesion means; ii) the support of active life as a social and historical imperative in the domestic sphere; iii) the construction of ways of economic and cultural autonomy in marginalized societies and excluded from the longstanding indigenous development linked to identity processes of a community nature; and iv) the social construction of hybrid institutional arrangements between the economic and work context.

Therefore, it is necessary to insist on the conception of a work that also looks for covering material needs and framed cultural, social, and even political approaches related to social fabric. Work shows itself as that enhancer of family and community cohesion, without being limited to the adult population. It covers working children, especially in contexts of communities with certain degrees of exclusion, where the dynamics of the community economy can be interpreted as resistance to the capitalist logic of consumption and accumulation.

The work of children and adolescents is established as a contribution, as they are family members, it aims at satisfying subsistence needs, rather than generating significant surpluses. This distinguishes it even from the mode of

production of capitalist enterprises. In economic terms, craft workshops are ways of family and community work organization to resist with principles somewhat different from those of the market, typical of capitalism, or, at least, soften it by prioritizing intangible assets related to culture, tradition and educational training.

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