

Social construction of the labor pathways of young people in Latin America: policies, institutions, mechanisms and subjectivities

Selection of articles published in: Editorial Teseo, 2010, Buenos Aires, "La construcción social de las trayectorias laborales de los jóvenes: políticas, instituciones, dispositivos y subjetividades" (Claudia Jacinto, Coordinator)



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Foreword

Over the past two decades, youth labor insertion has been a central aspect of the discussion of the new social issues because, with the crisis of the Welfare State and full employment, what is really at stake are the systemic mechanisms of social integration. Young people, in particular those coming from low income groups, are at risk of being confined to precarious and unstable jobs and/or being placed in the category of “socially-assisted” people through means of public subsidies. The labor exclusion or vulnerability of those deprived of the socio-educational capital needed to attain a good job reflects a strong intra-generational gap that is widening because of the disparity in educational opportunities.

In the framework of these concerns, this booklet gathers together a series of contributions from two projects geared at examining this problem. The first and most important one is a research project (PICT-BID 2005, n° 33582) funded by Argentina’s national agency for the promotion of science and technology (Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica).¹ The project, called “*Trayectorias educativo-laborales de jóvenes. Incidencia de políticas y programas de inclusión social*”², was led by Claudia Jacinto and developed as part of a program of studies on youth, education and labor (PREJET)³ under the auspices of the institute for economic and social development (IDES)⁴. The second one, an exchange project in the framework of the French-Argentine cooperation program on scientific and technological training for research (SECyT-ECOS)⁵ focused on youth labor insertion policies. It was led by Catherine Agulhon and Claudia Jacinto.

This selection of articles covers two main areas:

The first part covers the policies and approaches of the programs aimed at providing support and labor insertion mechanisms for young people in Latin America. It incorporates the debates, conceptual approaches and actions carried out in the field in terms of public policies. Emphasis is placed on recent changes in perspective, the scope of the actions and their results, showing the challenges posed to the educational, labor and social inclusion of young people. The systemic approach adopted by the different policies that play a role in this transition stage prompts us to undertake a comparative analysis of their orientations, means of implementation, complementarities, contradictions and tensions as a function of socio-historical trends in the relationship between education and employment.

In the second part, another series of articles examines the relationships between education and the world of work in the pathways of young people from low income households. The common thread between these articles is the adoption of a common perspective on the macro-structural conditioning factors determining the opportunities and the access to different types of resources, as well as the subjective pathways and perspectives of the youth. In this vein, a number of articles examine the impact of the training for the job mechanisms on the labor pathways. The impact covers not only the possibilities of access to employment and the quality of the jobs but also the footprints left on young people’s subjectivity and the knowledge regarding employment. Thus, the impacts of internships at high school level, of vocational training courses and of alternative options to finishing high school education are examined. How these activities take on new meanings and how they contribute to new subjectivities is also examined, considering that the capacity of young people to change their own destiny is both socio-structurally limited and sometimes fostered by the institutional mediations involved.

In brief, this work hopes to contribute to the sociological knowledge of the labor transitions of young people in conditions of vulnerability, on the limits and the scope of the policies and

¹ We will call this project “Trayectorias” throughout.

² Translator’s Note: Although it has not been officially translated, it means “Educational and labor pathways of the young. Impact of social inclusion policies and programs”.

³ Programa de Estudios sobre Juventud, Educación y Trabajo

⁴ Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social

⁵ Programa de Cooperación Argentino-Francesa de Formación para la Investigación Científica y Tecnológica

programs aimed at supporting them, and on the social construction of new institutional mechanisms and subjectivities that may have an impact on their pathways.

We wish to acknowledge all those who contributed to the development of the project: the researchers, the fellows who got involved in the project (who participated in a study and discussion group where many of the main ideas present in this booklet were born); the research and field work assistants who provided their support to different activities; the twelve educational institutions and the public and not-for-profit private vocational training centers who answered all our questions and, above all, provided us with their relentless support to get hold of the young graduates; and to the young people interviewed who participated enthusiastically in the endeavor to rebuild their pathways. We wish to particularly show our gratitude to Verónica Millenaar, a fellow at the PICT project, for her valuable and enthusiastic contribution and work throughout all stages of the research, to Carolina Dursi and Alenka Mereňuk for their important contribution in reviewing the articles and to Catherine Agulhon for the richness of the exchange of views, for her open mind and her cordiality.

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Introduction: elements for an analytical framework of the labor insertion mechanisms⁶ for young people and their impact on pathways

By Claudia Jacinto

This introduction⁷ proposes a conceptual overview of the assumptions and starting points that set the framework for the approaches followed in this volume. At the same time, it points to the various chapters in which these views are further examined and refined, as well as to other concepts stemming from our findings.

1. Labor transitions of the youth as a field of study

A social problem turns into a sociological one when posed in terms of its social global understanding. That is what has happened with the transition processes of young people towards the world of work.

When the step forward from education to labor in times of full employment was precisely that, a step, insertion was not an issue. Moving from youth to adulthood was marked by an exit from the childhood home, to take on both labor and family reproduction responsibilities. Both reproduction and social mobility would make their headway through socialization and social integration.

As a consequence of major social transformations, the end of the welfare state and the full employment era, and also the increase in inequality, the societal integration of the young generation according to a sequence of institutional steps moving from education to labor was disrupted at the end of the 20th century. Thus, youth labor insertion became first a social problem and then a sociological one, just as the situation of the youth on the labor market today spearheads deep changes in societal models, on the social issue, and in the relationships between education and labor, and represents a challenge for public policies aiming at creating equal opportunities. At the same time, we cast a spotlight not only on the active life entry mechanisms or mobility between generations but also on the nature of the social contract, the social link and the contents of public policies (Demaziere and Dubar, 1994). The study of the new labor insertion complexities is situated at the crossroads between labor sociology, economy, education sociology and youth sociology.

The primary focus of the study is the economy, followed by education sociology. The old and changing relationships between education and labor over the past two decades, in view of growing unemployment, especially among youths, have highlighted the limits of theories based on a “mechanical” and simplified notion of balance/imbalance, such as the theory of human capital. The contributions made by Bourdieu and Passeron regarding the devaluation of educational assets and inflation of diplomas have made this clear. In addition, the educational economy perspective thanks to the contributions made by the filter theory (Arrow, 1973) and the so-called “cascade effect” on employment due to overqualification (Carnoy, 1982), among others, assist us in understanding these would-be imbalances which are at the same time linked to the increasing number of graduate students of both high school and tertiary education and to

⁶ Following the French terminology on this kind of topic, we have used the term “labor insertion mechanism” (*dispositif* in French) for all the kind of public program or service geared at improving the labor insertion opportunities of the young.

⁷ A good part of the concepts and perspectives developed in this introduction are based on texts read and discussions held during the internal seminar built as this project unfolded. Fellows, research assistants and guest scholars were part of it. Allow me to express my deep gratitude to all of them, especially to the fellows who supported the project.

the employment crisis. This is so much the case that Tanguy (1986) posits in a famous text that the relationship between education and employment is nowhere to be found.

As stated by Dubar (1991), the situation whereby young people have to go and look for a job fresh out of school, sometimes for quite some time and with difficulties, is relatively recent, and it stems from a double historic movement: the one that split training and labor, at the end of the 19th century, and the recent one that broke the rule of automatic equivalence between training levels and access to quality jobs.

These issues have been studied at length from a macro-social perspective in industrialized nations since the 1960s, where the quantity and quality of the statistical information available has so permitted. The balances and imbalances between training level and employment, as well as the weight of other variables in these relationships, such as the childhood home, have been frequent since those days (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1967, 1972). Studies linking degrees to labor insertion and those concerning the follow-up of graduate students have all contributed to understanding the “derating trend”⁸ on the labor market (Lizé and Prokovas, 2007). Those that are more adversely impacted by these processes are the lower income groups for whom a weak cultural capital limits their knowledge of the rules of the game of the labor market. Besides, their scarce or weak social capital turns them into those most severely impacted by the devaluation of educational credentials (Bourdieu, 1988).

The implementation of “employment policies” focusing on providing insertion alternatives in view of the lack of jobs available provided for a greater coverage of these topics. The macro analyses of the policies themselves and of the role of the State and the institutions came on top of the structural trend analyses examining the links between education and labor. On the other hand, the institutional or interpretive analyses focused on the roles and relationships of the institutional and individual players (Charlot and Glassman, 1998). The biographic perspective has significantly contributed to understanding how educational inequities come about at all stages, from access to education to the step-by-step transition from education to labor (Heise and Meyer, 2004).

From a labor sociology perspective, the youth-to-jobs relationship changes have been understood through conceptual and analytical studies of major changes in labor organization, and especially through studies bearing on professional socialization and the construction of professional identities in a context of casual labor (e.g. Dubar, 1991; Nicole-Drancourt & Roulleau-Berger, 2001). These studies have shown how the individualization processes strongly influence youth labor insertion pathways as can be especially observed in the social organization of life cycles, i.e., school patterns, education-to-labor path, mobility during one’s active life course and the exit blueprint. These key socialization process moments are in crisis both for the institutions and the individuals (Castel, 1997; Dubar, 1996). On the other hand, from the youth sociology perspective, the links between labor transitions and the other dimensions of youth transitions (family, housing, etc.) have been outlined (e.g., Galland, 2002). By pointing out the temporality changes and the blurred line of the youth stage, it was shown that transition models are far from linear because (a) education and labor can co-exist from an early stage on and also because (b) patterns are complex: economic independence, personal and resource autonomy and the establishment of an independent home are far from taking place concomitantly and in a foreseeable manner.

Sociological studies on the issue have also contributed to showing the institutional strategies that (poorly) accompany the youth transitions, both from a macro and a micro perspective. In this respect, those approaches that take a systemic look, integrating both macro and micro social levels, have grown in relevance (Morch *et al*, 2002). The systemic approach followed by various transition policies is a good starting point to carry out a comparative analysis of the implementation approaches, patterns and designs, their complementarities, their contradictions

⁸ Concept used by Bourdieu to signal the imbalances between training and labor in terms of downward mobility.

and tensions related to the social and historical trends in education opportunities, training for work and employment.

Little by little, this new research and conceptualization field has contributed to building a new sociological knowledge field, and there are authors who have already called it “occupational insertion sociology” (Trottier, 2001). Others believe that the education-labor transitions are the main field from which one may understand and suggest theories on the youth in social studies (Pollock, 2008). However, this is an unfinished field which is permanently under construction and which is not even close to having shown enough consistency (Dubar, 2001).

The notion of “insertion” itself has been questioned in view of the difficulties encountered in finding a common ground on its time frame borders. As a matter of fact, the “exit of the educational system” notion loses sharpness in a society calling for continuous education and life-long learning. Many young people start working when they are in high school. So the notion whereby there is a border or a clear breaking line between education and labor becomes weak and the transition theory gets stronger. Hence pathways are defined not by one but by multiple “transitions”. These have been defined as the entire biographic body of socialization processes thrusting the young towards professional and familial emancipation (Casal, 1996).

The series of provisional, unstable and precarious conditions, with periods of unemployment, voluntary inactivity for study reasons or otherwise, does not lead to a clear-cut border between these transitions. Does insertion mean having a provisional employment or is it rather the certainty of sustained employment stability? Does it mean upholding a decent job? Or are the path stabilization indicators to be found in the salary or the income and its relationship to autonomy for the young person? Thus, the notion of “transition” also has its weaknesses, especially when wondering what the finish line is. That is why using the plural, “transitions”, is more compatible with the contemporary configuration of biographies.

A strong characteristic of these topics is that research and theoretical frameworks have gone hand in hand with the concern and implementation of policies for the young, not only in the field of education but also in support and labor insertion.

Transitions therefore stem from complex interactions located both at a structural and institutional macro social level and at an individual and institutional micro social level (Dubar, 2001). In order to tackle the relationships found in the labor transitions of the young, a number of clear levels of analysis to be taken into account crop up: (a) structural factors shaping them from a macro-social level, including labor market specifics, the grid of relationships built between education, training and production in each local and national context and their corresponding public policies; (b) insertion options and characteristics according to individual social demographics (especially social origin, educational level and gender); (c) the training and labor paths followed based upon individual strategies and subjective appreciations; and (d) the institutional interventions and the players taking part in the insertion process, starting with the school itself upto the vocational training centers, from the employment agencies and helpdesks to the companies, all of which are in turn part of local or sectorial action systems. One of the most exciting debates on the research paths has to do with that grid and the weight, impact and explanatory value of each dimension along the process.

Both the institutional construction of the training-job relationships and the strategies implemented by the young in a restrictive and segmented labor market ultimately lay out a research field with blurred borders and many approaches and calls for both social critique and international comparisons (Trottier, 2001).

2. A complex lattice of structural conditioning factors, pathways and subjective strategies.

Structural conditions obviously have an impact on insertion patterns. Indeed, the emergence of insertion as a social problem does not seem to have profoundly changed the validity of the main education sociology or social mobility sociology explanatory models as framed before the employment crisis (Dubar and Demaziere, 1994).

Over and above the weight of the structural model and the macro-economic conditions, the characteristics of the labor transitions can only be understood within the grid linking education, labor market and training in a given society (Verdier and Buechteman, 1998). The development model and production modes, labor market segmentation, the degrees, knowledge and competencies required by each segment, universal approaches and/or those focused on public policies targeting the youth, diagnoses made of the challenges of the young on the labor market or even the political-conceptual outlook regarding distributive fairness, all of these are dimensions that help to construct transitions. And then the selection of young people on the basis of a given educational level or degree or specific personal characteristics must be understood in the framework of such a lattice. The individual attributes of the young as a reflection of the structural configuration of society are valued as a function of the labor management processes followed by companies, of the distribution of degrees and the “oversupply” or scarcity of job seekers (as a function of profiles required by the market) in a specific geographical and socio-economic context (Boudon, 1973). These issues are tackled in the chapter on insertion based on Latin American cases.

The abundance or scarcity of labor demand and quality are direct conditioning factors of the labor insertion of the young (ILO, 2007). To reach this conclusion, statistical evidence was taken as a starting point to examine the complexity of the transition processes. Both the data linking educational levels, employment and poverty⁹ and those bearing on the paths followed by the young¹⁰ in quantitative terms allow for the establishment of a general trend in these processes. Thus, in Argentina, the EPH¹¹ (permanent household survey) data showed that in general terms there was a decrease in unemployment levels, although there was a rather high persistence of unemployment and a low job quality among the young, during the economic boost years, between 2003 and 2006.

Within these general trends, young people coming from poor households are the least benefited by the educational effort. Indeed, when groups of poor vs. non-poor young populations are compared, looking at whether they finished high school or not, one sees that poverty and opportunity patterns are reproduced, as the poor who manage to graduate from high school are in a worse labor market condition than the non-poor who do not finish high school, at least in terms of unemployment and employment quality (Jacinto & Chitarroni, 2009). The link between education and labor is strongly conditioned by a labor market with a high and persistent level of precariousness, at around 40%. The young populations, given their secondary educational level when compared to their parents, have expectations that are not consistent with the actual restricted labor market conditions, and thus spend more time looking for a job than adults (Weller, 2007; Pérez, 2008).

The absence of a linear relationship between educational level and labor insertion strongly conditions young people’s motivation to study and work. The meritocracy illusion loses its force, and social capital, personal contacts and recommendations frequently play a key role on the labor market for a young person to gain access to a decent job. Labor exclusion of those deprived

⁹ Fortunately, a number of research papers have been published in Argentina on the topic as, for example, Salvia 2008, Pérez 2008, Miranda, Otero and Corica 2008

¹⁰ Besides the articles included in this publication, other findings have been published or are in the making. See, for example, Jacinto and Chitarroni, 2009

¹¹ Encuesta Permanente de Hogares

of such social capital reflects a strong intra-generation gap that is widening because of the education quality differences between the youth as a function of their social and economic condition (Weller, 2007). As these reproducing trends develop – and high school education loses value as a protection agent against unemployment and as a way of gaining access to a quality job – one of the key issues studied by the “Trayectorias” research program consisted in finding out whether some of the programs examined allowed the exclusion cycle to be broken and sent signals that would guide public policies in this regard. However, in order to understand the dynamic that exists between structural and contextual conditioning factors, subjective strategies, institutional intervention and the programs in question longer periods have to be examined, along with segments of the pathways, in order to observe the sequencing of events, the stages, the decision making processes, and both access to and use of the resources by the youth during such transition processes.

Many studies carried out in developed nations, and some in our own environment, have already shown these non-linear patterns of the youth when moving from employment to unemployment and vice versa, from employment to inactivity and even from one job to the next under different conditions and levels of precariousness. Thus, these pathways show a growing diversification (Gautié, 2003), although this varies from one young person to the next. An individualization and fragmentation of life and labor patterns comes about, which tends to blur the certainties regarding labor and the ways to move towards adulthood. However, such individualization does not preclude the existence of groups that are similarly affected by the structural inequalities.

Because of the social inequalities in resources and opportunities, the paths unfold with biographic options that are wider or narrower. The capacity of an individual to manage his/her own transition to adulthood will essentially depend on his/her social and cultural capital, on the support received from his/her relatives and on the opportunities or restrictions existing in that educational, gender, social and ethnic origin context. Those with fewer opportunities will thus have “constellations of disadvantage”, understood as the complex relationships existing between socio-economic, institutional and individual factors (Walther & Pohl, 2005).

However, as indicated in a previous paper (Jacinto *et al*, 2007), although the structural elements build the grid of objective relationships followed by individuals, they do not fully explain the specifics of each path. Transitions reflect at the same time a personal will and structural and contextual conditioning factors that interplay dynamically and diversify the labor patterns followed. The biographical variables, i.e., the specific experiences of each individual – and hence the senses, meanings, strategies or decisions implied – allow us to understand the specifics of each pathway. Changes to the family condition, such as having a child, moving in with a partner, the death of a relative, or unemployment of the main provider, introduce a role change in the life of these young people which forces them to take on the responsibility of providing for the household. And then, although the pathways are built as a function of opportunities and access to resources, they also come about as a function of personal and individual decisions and strategies depending on, though not determined by, the structural and contextual framework (Giddens, 1997). In our modern world, where the fall of the institutions and the appearance of strong individualization processes is being discussed, the role of subjectivity and decision making on one’s own life crops up as both a value and a risk. When possibilities surface for the human agency in the field of creativity and personal initiative for building one’s own identity (Beck, Giddens *et al*, 1997), the lack of resources and collective support reduces, at the same time, the room for maneuver and the possibility to develop personal strategies and projects. Such individualization becomes a “forced individualization” (Robles, 1999). These tensions are particularly visible in the labor insertion processes of the youth. Those with a high level of education who come from a middle or high socio-economic environment are in a position to “scout”, to select their jobs rather as a function of what they learn or their possibility to combine it with their studies than what is phrased by labor specialists as a “decent job”. At the other end of the spectrum, young people who are poor are forced to accept a poorly qualified job under

bad conditions or to work in a precarious way on their own, although they would like to have a stable job.

Between these two extreme conditions, both sides deploy their own strategies, albeit with a very different degree of leeway.

There are, however, a number of interventions between the structural and subjective frameworks that may increase opportunities, develop resources and give momentum to the capacity to use them. Specifically, this paper is interested in examining the role played by institutions and labor insertion mechanisms targeted at youth with fewer opportunities.

3. The institutional framework in the intermediation between the structural and the subjective scenes¹²

The institutional and collective actors playing an intermediation role between the socio-economic structures and the individuals have an impact on the transition process (Verdier & Buechtemann, 1998). From our perspective, the institutional dimension is of the essence in order to understand the scope of a “labor insertion mechanism” and its influence on subjectivities and paths (Jacinto & Millenaar, 2009).

Throughout the modern age, institutions have represented not only control and socialization mechanisms but also spaces for subjectivity (Dubet & Martucelli, 1997). They established the organizing support of both the timeframes and the dynamics of the patterns while becoming resources useful for guiding strategies and decisions.

One may perceive a paradoxical process regarding the role of institutions that assist or should assist a transition. On the one hand, there is a crisis and a weakening of the large modern day social integration institutions (Dubet & Martucelli, 1997; Bauman, 2003, among others). This reinforces individualization processes and, as a negative consequence, leaves the individuals without protective support, especially in the framework of liberal socio-political models. In fact, social exclusion is linked to an institutional disaffiliation, closely linked in turn to employment problems and to the fact that social rights have had a close relationship with the state of being employed during the second half of the 20th century (Castel, 1997).

Even in a context of a decline of traditional institutions, the way individual patterns are established relates to institutional pathways and experiences and it becomes necessary to understand the links and processes they deploy in individual cases. Some traditional institutions, like schools, are still established as social insertion spaces despite their weakening (Jacinto & Freytes Frey, 2004; Tiramonti, 2007). Likewise, civil society organizations play a new role as seen from the construction of public, non-State dependent entities. The interventions aimed at assisting in the transition stages necessitate both the participation of traditional institutions and the creation of new institutional settings and new institutional players, much of which is achieved through building bridges between youth and employment. When the socio-political models focus on approaches based on citizens’ rights, new institutionalization structures are deployed in some measure, which also constitute–mobilization tools for subjective approaches and social control tools.

In fact, the role of institutions both in the configuration of subjectivities and in the construction of *habitus* may not be defined *a priori*. Such processes depend nowadays not so much on the type of institution but on each concrete institution itself and the extent to which it is deployed as a space for inclusion, reproduction or social participation.

Thus, understanding the transitions and the opportunity structure of a society involves studying the concrete institutions where the lives of the youth unfold. In this particular case we refer to

¹² This item is mainly based on Jacinto & Millenaar, 2009

the institutions involved in the transition process, i.e., from schools to employment services, without forgetting the vocational training centers and the social organizations.

They play a role by providing not only resources but also the tools to implement them. We define the institutional intervention role played in the transition to labor as the measure and shape deployed by each institution as a place for: labor socialization, social inclusion and educational continuity. The evidence collected in the *Trayectorias* study tells us, for example, that the vocational training centers¹³ with a strong identity (linked to a vocational family, to a territory, to a binding relationship with the youth seeking quality jobs) produce, under certain conditions, a “transfer of the institutional social capital” to the individuals attending them. Thus, the possibilities of young people underpinning their resources, whether such resources are a high school diploma, a vocational certificate, an internship or the knowledge and skills derived from these paths, are enhanced. In this framework, the links established with the institutions and the teachers become a key factor in this twofold process of acquiring a vocational and a social identity.

4. The labor insertion mechanisms involved in the transition

The papers included in this booklet explore the insertion processes of the young from different and complementary perspectives: while acknowledging the structural conditioning factors, they investigate the subjective strategies’ scope for action, the institutional mediations, and the policies and programs suggested in order to improve the job opportunities of the young. Generally speaking, these policies in Argentina have specifically been focused on young people with “insertion challenges”. This generally involves those young people who did not manage to finish high school and/or those living in poverty.

The labor insertion mechanisms for the young were conceived as part of the active employment policies devised to deal with the high unemployment rate among the youth (since the beginning of the 1980s in Europe, ten years later in Argentina). On the basis of a diagnosis acknowledging the employment crisis as a starting point, the measures stemmed from the assumption that the difficulties faced by the youth were essentially due to their low qualifications. Such an assumption was solid in the developed nations in view of the expansion of education, the requirements of a new labor organization and the massive introduction of new technologies in the wake of the crisis of the accumulation models. In Argentina, although education expansion did occur it did not reach the same levels as in Europe (even today around 50% of the youth does not finish high school in due course) and the productive heterogeneity is less compelling about the need for a generalization of the new labor organization modes and a corresponding change in skills required. All that is obvious is that the massive new information and communication technologies have changed the basic competencies required by the world of labor and by life itself. Indeed, the exclusion society modes that generated few jobs were the main reason behind a phenomenon that had an impact on all of society and not only on the young. The boundaries and fallacies of such diagnoses have been pointed out by previous papers (Jacinto, 2004, Salvia, 2008). Among the mechanisms involved, training for the job (from the more traditional and simple approaches in a trade to more complex models including socio-vocational coaching, reinforcement of basic skills, internships etc.) and the support grants for micro-enterprises dominated the scene. More recently, not only the active employment and vocational training policies have been acknowledged as support policies for the transition pathway but also those fostering the completion of the high school cycle.¹⁴

¹³ Paradoxically, as is well known, this is one of the weakest links of the Argentine educational system.

¹⁴ From our perspective, secondary schooling policies should also be included as support actions of the youth labor transition. However, such a concept is still not visible in Argentina’s public policies. Likewise, other sectoral and general policies are a conditioning factor, as they widen or restrict the opportunities pertaining to the transition process, such as housing, access to credit lines, etc.

Although the problems of the labor market and the uneven distribution of general opportunities are currently recognised, actions tend to focus on the youth themselves, on offsetting unachieved learning during the previous educational patterns and on specific for-the-job training mechanisms. Nevertheless, it seems that there has recently been a turning point in the corresponding public policies on the basis of at least three clear-cut traits: a) a more systemic understanding of the relationships between a job-creating socio-productive model and the opportunities of the youth; b) a strong promotion of a longer formal schooling cycle and measures aimed at improving the quality of employment; and c) a stronger focus on permanently strengthening the institutions, i.e., on improving the quality of the educational and training services provided and developing networks of players to do so.

Behind the analysis of policies and mechanisms there is a central question: How useful is it to get involved in order to promote greater inclusion pathways? Can the use of a labor insertion mechanism change or refocus the education and labor decision making process in the pathways to employment of the young? If the number of schooling years and the quality of education to which the youth have access have such a strong impact on the social and labor destiny of the youth within the social and cultural capital of the households as pointed out by empirical evidence, then what is the role of the specific institutions that develop mechanisms for the creation of opportunities? What are the profiles of those who are best positioned to take advantage of such actions? What kinds of programs have the greatest role to play in such an inclusion process, and in what context? Such questions are dealt with from different perspectives and approaches in the various articles of this booklet.

5. Rationale at stake in the labor insertion mechanisms

As mentioned before, we have used the word “mechanisms” for the interventions, both in- and outside public policies, which explicitly aim at taking a stand to enhance the labor insertion path of the young. We refer to mechanisms linked to: (a) high school retention or completion; (b) first job, practice in the workplace and vocational training experiences; (c) other training experiences and/or job creation either as independent workers or as a micro-enterprise.

A number of the articles that follow search for the impact of two types of mechanisms: vocational training courses and internships. A micro-approach has been used to place the institutional and individual players at the core of the mechanism in order to understand these relationships.

Research seeks out information regarding the scarce follow-up tradition in Argentina of high school and university graduates.¹⁵ The impact of the training for work mechanisms in the pathways of the young has been virtually unexamined. However, in these times of labor pathway constructions on the basis of multiple combinations of formal, non formal and informal education experiences, as well as other subjective experiences, it becomes particularly interesting to further explore how such pathways are built as a function of the multiple combinations available.

The notion of “impact of the mechanism” was defined from a wide perspective regarding the footprints of such paths. It was not only about knowing the certificates and learning of those who undertake that path. Nor was it about the eventual labor insertion. Indeed, the way in which individuals take ownership of such experiences, are motivated by them, the way in which they used them to obtain other resources, such as a social capital, economic support, social participation, etc. were also considered.

¹⁵ It is scarce because Gallart (2006) and Filmus, Miranda and their team (2001) are almost the only ones to cover high school graduates and provide knowledge on the insertion of technicians or to compare the various types of insertion patterns of high school graduates. Conversely, a number of research papers have focused on university graduates (for example, Panaia, 2009).

We suggest the concept of “rationale behind the mechanisms” to refer to the assumptions or starting points guiding them and the actions they emphasize¹⁶. Among these assumptions, a first tier refers to the way the employment problems of the youth are being diagnosed and, in particular, the importance of the general and local structural conditioning factors, as well as that of the youth themselves and their educational, social and other characteristics. This dimension has been underscored in the literature as an essential structuring line for guiding the measures: what to emphasize? The opportunity structures in a wide scope or acting on an individual plane with the youth themselves? (Walter & Pohl, 2005). The vastly challenged targeting approach during the 1990s has paved the way for a new universalistic approach¹⁷ and a greater emphasis on the two previous questions. But although the measures targeting the structural aspects are different when there is a neoliberal approach to society than from a rights and distributive justice based approach, the specific measures reflect rather an eclecticism where many aspects look alike (Jacinto, 2008).

A second dimension of the assumptions is how to define the groups targeted by the mechanisms and the “constellation of disadvantage” they endure. The high school education policies have a wide scope and they promote inclusion of all, even more so considering that the law stipulates that high school education is compulsory. However, they do not manage to overcome the existing segmentation. What happens with the measures fostering school completion for those who were excluded from the system? Reference will be made later on to historical shortages of this level and to the existing policies aimed at strengthening education of young people and adults while proposing a greater flexibility to respond to multiple subjects.

Regarding the measures more directly linked to labor insertion, many questions arise regarding the scope and specifics of how to consider the conditioning factors of individual youths at both the public policy and micro-institutional levels. For example, is there a difference between the mechanisms geared at poor young individuals with a low level of skills living in slums affected by territorial segregation and those geared at young people coming from low educational capital households but who managed to finish high school? Do the mechanisms envisage gender perspectives and problems related to the condition of women? This type of question is related to the way the specific challenges posed by each group of young people or each youth is understood or not. As will be shown in various chapters in this booklet, the number of transitions and biographical paths followed by the young would seem to point at designing mechanisms that take them into account both collectively and individually, and not only through labor actions. Indeed, the “constellation of disadvantage” is built starting from factors related to the family (precocious family responsibilities, gender issues, urgency to get an income, the “absence” of the family, a weak social relations network), the school (low quality of supply, lack of coaching), the area (segregation, ecological marginalization, scarce and poor access to health services), company selection strategies (requirements based on devalued diplomas, stigmatization, discrimination) etc.

A third dimension is the conceptualization of the institutions in charge of developing the mechanisms for getting those populations closer to the labor market. Basically this refers to the role of secondary school, the established vocational training centers and other participating organizations or institutions, such as NGOs, companies and employment agencies. In this vein one may wonder whether these are permanent institutions or ones with sustainability risks, and if they meet the conditions and have the resources needed to provide quality services. It is also worth considering the different conceptions of educational quality and the labor market that reflect the actions of these institutions, and the participation of other players (NGOs, social organizations, trade unions, companies) in the construction of non-State owned public spaces.

¹⁶ On this topic, a general classification is being introduced to isolate the types of mechanisms studied in this booklet, although some types of mechanisms are not covered by this publication.

¹⁷ Universalism is a concept widely used in social policy and welfare state literature. By universalism a reference is often made to certain kinds of redistribution. Their characteristics are discussed in the later chapters - see Jacinto “*Twenty years...*”

A fourth dimension deals more concretely with what the specific mechanisms offer: educational actions (linked to the secondary school completion), vocational training actions, practices or internships in companies, activation/coaching and/or startups, etc. All these actions are sometimes intertwined and sometimes they are developed as self-standing projects. Taking into account these criteria we suggest the following classification of “rationale behind the mechanisms” (for Argentina):

Logic # 1: vocational training

- (a) Model with the participation of social players in the labor market (unions, companies);
- (b) Model with a territorial/religious/NGO base;
- (c) Pure school model

This kind of mechanism assumes that specific training will enhance youth employability or employment. We have included here all the mechanisms generally involved in active employment and/or vocational training policies, which may also be developed by public or not-for-profit private social programs.¹⁸ They generally target young people who have not finished high school, although they also include those who have. Departing from this first outline the diversity of modes, institutions and actions included in this model is vast.

In principle, a distinction should be made between those courses providing specific training for a job and those that are standard vocational training courses delivering certificates recognized by the corresponding educational authorities. Vocational training unfolded in Argentina as a model that resembles the school model and grew on the basis of a spontaneous social demand. It is generally speaking a marginal sector of the educational system, bearing no relation to the other modes, historically categorised by a lack of resources, a low training level of the teachers and origins in the demand of poor sectors to train them for trades (at least in terms of public supply). However, these centers have played a significant social role by providing job creation tools for self-employment and social participation channels to vast segments of the population (Jacinto, 1998b). Besides, recent education and labor initiatives have given a new momentum and more resources to this sector and some high quality benchmark centers are now starting to be put in place, especially for some specific activities.

Vocational training centers usually report to Provincial educational systems and are located inside premises used for educational purposes (60% of them, known as “pure centers”) are linked, through agreements, to NGOs, churches and trade unions.¹⁹ These centers represent the permanent institutions in this field and according to the classification coming from research they may be classified as follows:

Model a) centers are those having signed an agreement with the labor world, i.e., trade unions or companies. Such a link improves what has traditionally been a vocational training weakness - the repetition of courses year after year regardless of the needs of the labor world. Model b) centers are those generally based on civil society organizations that may or may not have entered an agreement with the State. In the case of the non-agreement centers, such a situation provides them both with greater autonomy and less sustainability. That is why they develop different mechanisms in terms of contents, pedagogical strategies and segments of the labor market targeted. Internal diversity is also vast and little known, with the exception of some qualitative studies (Jacinto, 1998ab; Gallart, 2000).

¹⁸ There is also a large number of private training institutions selling their courses, but they constitute a world devoid of regulations from which no data are available.

¹⁹ The State pays for the salaries of both the teachers and the administration. In the case of the agreements with other institutions, the latter cover their inputs and maintenance costs.

Model c) are those called 'pure' centers. They have been created following an educational service rationale, usually function inside schools, are essentially course providers and do not have an external support structure over and beyond the educational system itself. As shown in the chapter that covers these mechanisms, the three institutional profiles (and their sub-types) work with young people with various socio-demographical characteristics and they leave different footprints in the pathways of those young people (Jacinto & Millenaar; and Millenaar, in this volume).

Logic # 2: labor activation/guidance/learning in the workplace

With this logic we identify the following types of mechanisms:

- a) Fostering the employment of young people by companies with tax incentives and/or other means.
- b) Internships in companies.
- c) Social and labor guidance (in two modes: *ad hoc* modules – before, during or after the vocational training courses – or by means of employment services).

All of these mechanisms depart from the diagnosis that access barriers to jobs and disorientation regarding the rules of the game of the world of work play a significant role in the employment problems of the youth.

Both intermediation and guidance aim at placing the youth closer to the workplace. Intermediation tries to place jobs ahead of labor demand, with strategies ranging from providing information to contacting the youth with desirable, decent jobs. The “bridge to the company” effect of this mechanism is considered an essential part of this strategy. For its part, social and labor guidance aims at bridging the gap with the labor market and its rationale for selecting and hiring, etc. Such logics are usually unknown to the young, especially when they come from low cultural capital households (Bourdieu, 1988) or when their relatives have endured long periods of labor exclusion.

These mechanisms target young people with different profiles, although those living in poverty or having low levels of qualifications are given priority. Such a focalization is paradoxical. On the one hand it tries to exert an impact on equal opportunities by getting decent jobs closer to those young people whose social capital did not foresee such a situation. But on the other hand, such focusing shows that this type of mechanism has not reached an institutional level whereby just any youngster may reach this service level, and that it is far from being considered “a right” as is the case, for example, in some European countries.

The mechanisms aimed at stimulating the companies gained stronger momentum in laws enacted in the 1990s that made hiring more flexible. In the 2000s, some specific agreements were signed to foster the arrival of some young people from poor environments to quality jobs²⁰.

Internships are on-the-job training stages, supplementing training sessions in a classroom. They usually face the lack of an “internship culture” that values them as a learning environment where each player has a clear picture of his/her exchange role. There is thus a risk of distorting the meaning of the internship by substituting interns for workers and thus leaving aside the training purpose. However, as will be shown in the corresponding chapter (Jacinto and Dursi, in this volume), internships follow various institutional models, with different goals and frameworks, and involve young people with different profiles. All these institutional and individual situations have their impact on the subsequent labor insertion of those who graduate. But even with these

²⁰ This strategy is not focused in this research. In any case, some Latin American studies show that tax incentives in exchange for creating jobs for the young lead to discrimination practices that are difficult to overcome, or simply to the fact that the beneficiaries do not have the social and educational profiles needed by the companies (Weller, 2007).

caveats, the way young people value such mechanisms is highly positive and thus they have a new meaning in the framework of uncertainties surrounding the labor market nowadays.

Social and labor guidance is one of the strongest mechanisms of the decade, as explained in the chapter on policies. Be it through the reinforcement of employment services (recently) or through the inclusion of modules of this kind within broader interventions, it aims to provide “tools” to the young (i.e., information, skills, attitudes) to allow them to navigate an uncertain labor market. The formats adopted may conceptually be very different, ranging from instrumental approaches (learning to prepare a resume, etc.) to supporting labor projects by means of institutional and collective tools. Or ranging from traditional gender approaches to more equal-gender-opportunity approaches. And these have highly different impacts on the pathways of the young (Jacinto & Millenaar; and Millenaar, in this volume).

Logic # 3: Promoting high school completion

- a) Standing supply of Education for Young and Adults (EDJA²¹)
- b) Alternative EDJA supply

As high school education is necessary and compulsory, many mechanisms linked to both educational policies and employment aim at fostering high school completion. In fact, most of the economically active population has not completed high school. In some cases this mechanism is linked to vocational training.

The mechanism assumes that the best way to boost access to good jobs is to have higher educational levels, an assumption clearly backed up by the available statistical data.

The institutional basis of such a mechanism is the so-called EDJA Centers. For many years, these services have been located on the sidelines of the educational system, with little support, resources and conceptual clarity. Such an educational provision is not widely known, as pointed out by the corresponding article in this book. Recently the level has received institutional backing in the country with national educational and labor programs (called “*Fines*” and “*Terminalidad educativa*”).

In this field, new educational experiences have emerged. They aim at developing alternative models to bring on board youth and adults coming from the most vulnerable population sectors. These are popular high school diplomas provided in public schools, but privately managed and organized by various social movements. The article analyzing the educational pathways linked to such organizations shows that these popular high school diplomas have fulfilled the initial expectations of the youth by keeping them in the classroom and providing them with a diploma. However, such an educational proposition has meant different things to different groups of young people (Mereñuk, in this book).

Logic # 4: Micro-enterprises and creating one’s own job

This type of mechanism stems from the assumption that in view of the lack of jobs or decent jobs for all of the youth, other job creation devices should be encouraged²². The poorest among the young, whose socio-educational profiles depart the most from those required by formal jobs, may very often engage in programs fostering the creation of micro-enterprises. They get management support and grants with different kinds of limitations, as will be described in the chapter on Latin American policies.

²¹ Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos

²² We point at self-employment as a service targeting young people who have difficulties in finding a job. There may obviously be young people who choose to be self-employed, and in such cases they are also sometimes assisted.

Such programs sometimes try to propose “magic” solutions to unemployment (ILO, 2007). But they show a lack of concern for the low technical quality of the courses and scant acknowledgement of the difficulties encountered by the young because of their lack of work experience and experience managing their own enterprises. On the other hand, specific studies of an Argentine program show that even in a context of poverty those young people with the highest integration levels are those who manage to participate (leaving the most vulnerable on the sidelines). However, they still fail to improve their occupational condition, especially women, because of their responsibilities in their family (Tuñón & Salvia, 2008).

6. As a final thought

Summing up, this first chapter shows the approaches and tensions of the policies aimed at supporting youth labor insertion, the growth of the mechanisms linked to subjective dimensions, and the macro-social and institutional limits wherein they evolve. Some common trends between various types of mechanisms may be observed but with highly different institutional presence. One clear example of this is the weaknesses and scarcity of sectorial consultation and information systems in Argentina.

The chapters contained in the second part of this collection show that the pathways of the young are built around the link between the structural, institutional and biographical planes. When the labor insertion mechanisms are examined from a micro-institutional perspective they show specific configurations where different meanings, goals, and labor markets are intertwined. When the pathways are examined from this perspective, the institutions’ interventions play a role in the educational and labor integration plane but also on the social identity side. They enable the target person to mobilize knowledge and skills and, in more general terms, they have an impact on labor socialization, in consolidating a vocation, in configuring new educational and labor projects, and in many cases they are key to the splitting of the pathways.

This micro-social analysis acknowledges, however, the limits imposed by the macro-structural conditioning factors and it shows that many pathways cannot stay clear of social reproduction. Moreover, one of the strongest findings of this research is that the youth with a high school diploma who have followed a mechanism (especially one of the programs studied) have greater labor insertion opportunities. But in the context of a society that has not built the systemic inclusion and sustained development mechanisms over the past years, in spite of an economic upturn, such an improved positioning just about gets them decent jobs but does not put them in a rising social mobility process.

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Twenty years of training policies for the employment of vulnerable youths in Latin America: persistent situations and reformulations.

By Claudia Jacinto

1. Introduction

This paper intends to reflect on the assumptions, trends, and strategies of the programs aiming at youth labor insertion in Latin America. The main objective will be to compare the programs from the 1990s and 2000s so as to ponder over their similarities and differences.²³

Latin America has been deeply affected by major changes in both society and the world of work in the last decades. On this continent, major cultural, social, ethnic, and racial inequalities and differences have historically existed. The uneven income and wealth distribution is reflected in the unequal educational and labor opportunities. A new reality, marked by globalization — which strengthens social segmentation — is added to this background of exclusion.

Socioeconomic and labor market conditions have deteriorated in recent decades. The most visible signs of this deterioration have been increased unemployment in several countries, and an even more widespread decrease in the quality of employment. The creation of new jobs has been weak and focused on the informal sector; real wages have been low and formal employment has been affected by labor deregulation. The production structure is heterogeneous and the labor markets are segmented. In the present decade, the region has undergone macroeconomic policy change leading to six years of growth (between 2002 and 2008) and improved labor market conditions. As it was affected by the international crisis, there was a new increase in unemployment — although not paralleling the level of the 1990s — together with a deterioration in the quality of the jobs created. Nevertheless, various diagnoses agree on the fact that, on this occasion, the crisis had a less dramatic impact on the region than on previous occasions. Poverty levels remained high during the decade, but it is estimated that the rise in social expenditure in the last few years and the increase in the number of programs in that area have been essential to containing the social costs of the crisis (ECLAC, 2009).

In this framework, it is worth wondering about the types of knowledge required by these economies. For some time, there has been consensus on the increased requirements of basic and transferable skills both for life and for any job. In addition, that baseline acknowledges a polarization of the qualifications required.

The secondary school diploma is a requirement for many jobs, even though its value on the labor market varies according to the expansion of the education levels in each country and the needs of their labor markets. In any case, this diploma is far from sufficient for ensuring the quality of jobs in socio-productive contexts where the informal sector and unregistered employment play, with some variations, a significant role in all the Latin American labor markets.

Although this outlook affects all young people, the situation is even more unfavorable for those who are poor and/or have low education levels²⁴. For them, the weak links to the world of formal labor equate, in the context of new approaches to the social issue, to their participation in social and employment programs, where this group of young people is placed in the “aided” category.

In this context, what does it mean to “train” the young with low qualifications “for work”?

²³ The empirical base is made up of the comparative study of 52 programs developed during the 2000s and the conclusions of previous studies conducted in the 1990s by the author.

²⁴ Defined as those youngsters who have not completed the 12 years of compulsory schooling.

Since their emergence in the scene of State policies during the 1990s, programs focused on the labor insertion of the youth with low formal schooling levels have been compensatory in nature, and have usually been based on individual disadvantages. At present, it is evident that providing technical training courses only — as social and employment programs have tended to do — overlooks a complex series of structural, institutional, family, individual, and subjective dimensions which place these young people in a largely unfavorable position in terms of work opportunities.

These actions notably involved implementing focused programs aimed at providing initial job training, apprenticeships, and support to micro-businesses. They have been executed in a limited and fragmented fashion, with little global coherence, and even from opposing perspectives (Jacinto, 2008). To a large extent, these are specific programs that, on many occasions, start from partial diagnoses of the difficulties encountered by poor youths. In general, they share a non-specific diagnosis of the problems on the labor market and the so-called training “deficiencies” of the youngsters themselves. The realities of the young are far more complex and demonstrate disadvantages of all kinds: having access only to poor-quality primary and, in some cases, secondary schools; living in segmented and low-income territories with restricted access to basic services; assuming family responsibilities at an early stage; lacking good-quality vocational training opportunities and “bridges” to good jobs, among others.

In the 2000s, initiatives of this kind were reformulated in response to new conceptualizations of the problem in the framework of changes in the regional socio-political and economic context. This paper will mainly focus on discussing both the extent and the manner in which approaches have changed in the current mechanisms, in the context of broader perspectives of the “social issue”. Following the arguments of Walther and Pohl (2005), the purpose will be to discuss the extent to which approaches reflect an individual or structural understanding of the problem (i.e. whether they address the individual skills to face labor insertion, or socio-economic or institutional aspects conditioning the transitions, either the conditions in which the young people develop their skills — school structures — or the conditions in which they enter the labor market — structures of entry into the labor market and demand for labor. In addition, it will discuss whether there have been changes in the compensatory approach, i.e. the “second chance” nature that characterized these programs in the 1990s.

2. The 1990s: the youth in employment policies

It is not necessary here to go into great detail about the socio-economic processes and socio-political trends predominating in the 1990s, as they have been widely discussed in previous papers (Jacinto, 2004; 2008). Globalization, a weakened role of the State, and production adjustments all strengthened the heterogeneity and historic social inequalities in Latin America.

In this context, employment policies started to be developed; the passive ones included efforts responding to a compensation rationale — individual subsidies, grants, etc. — while the active ones aimed at mobilizing the labor supply, the manpower qualification, and the “creation” of jobs by means of specific efforts, such as subsidies and micro-business development programs.

“Given the social impact of a structural adjustment”, from a neoliberal perspective, it was held that the State had to intervene where the market failed. “Efficient labor markets” had to be promoted (Morrison, 2002) and “external” barriers had to be reduced by deregulating the labor market (Fawcett, 2002).

As a major State reform was being advocated —limiting its role—a rationale for assisting the excluded was implemented by means of compensatory efforts, both in the formal education and employment spheres, placing wide sectors of the population in the category of “aided” (Paugam, 1996).

Several arguments supported the emergence of programs specially addressed to unemployed youngsters with low qualifications. The first argument was the high unemployment rate in that specific group — more than twice the unemployment rate of the remaining economically active population— and the high levels of precariousness and underemployment among it. Unemployment was essentially attributed to training deficiencies: few years of formal schooling and a lack of specific job training placed these young people in an unfavorable situation for labor insertion, thus contributing to an individualistic notion of social disadvantage, as held by Bendit (2008). The second argument was the weakened supply of traditional vocational training linked to concrete job opportunities (Moura Castro, 1997). In effect, there was also an attempt to renew a supply of traditional vocational training courses deemed bureaucratic and supply-oriented — permanent institutions, teachers, and public officials — adapting them to a flexible, demand-oriented model. Third, a critical view was held as regards the regulations protecting youth employment, which were inflexible and unfavorable to the demand of a young workforce (Morrison, 2002).

The programs focused, to a large extent, on job training geared towards formal employment or insertion into self-employment or production enterprises. These were “training and support” actions (according to the typology proposed by Lefresne, 2007), which were, in most cases, coordinated by the Ministries of Labor and/or Employment, and financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and in some cases, by the World Bank. A “market” model was adopted, characterized by courses mainly provided by private vocational training centers and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with contracts awarded through tenders. Short and flexible job training courses, geared towards formal employment, were offered, including internships in companies. Several countries developed these programs: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay.

Another type of *ad hoc* program was developed in the framework of the Ministries of Social Development and/or Youth Institutes, which were also financed, in many cases, by multilateral agencies. In these cases, NGOs, foundations, churches (especially the Catholic one), national training centers, local governments, etc., received subsidies from the State to develop the programs in the non-formal education sector. In these cases, the training courses focused on the informal sector, self-employment and/or organization of micro-businesses. Specifically, these were efforts promoting self-enterprise as an alternative to the lack of employment, but without considering the motivations of the youth or creating appropriate support networks to foster their livelihoods (Jaramillo, 2004).

In general, the certificates awarded in the programs of both types were not acknowledged or had no equivalence in the regular vocational training, in spite of the fact that most young people covered by these programs did not have secondary school diplomas, and that one of the effects of participating in these programs was that around 30 percent of the youngsters returned to the formal education system (Jacinto, 2004).

The selection processes adopted by the institutions, including both the “market” and subsidy criteria, contributed very little, with a few exceptions, to the creation of a quality training system both related and adjusted to the needs of the young and the demands of the world of work and socio-economic development. Virtually none of the measures taken promoted links to the formal education sector or to the regular vocational training supply. Only a few experiences, with limited coverage, have adopted approaches considering the relationship with local and/or sectorial development projects (Jacinto, 1999).

Actions were based on the understanding that these young people’s low *employability* resulted from their scarce human capital (Moura Castro, 2001). These were youngsters from poor households who did not complete their secondary school studies or even their basic education, who took the worst jobs in the informal sector, had no labor protection, low wages, and could not accumulate work experience. Given the changes in the demand for qualifications, essentially based on the assumptions of the human capital theory, it was held that their lack or scarcity was the main

reason for the youths' employment problems. Both the structural inequalities in access to opportunities and the segmentation of the labor markets, which represented obstacles for the young to find decent jobs, were omitted.

The concept of *low employability* arose precisely at a time of increasing unemployment, but held youngsters themselves responsible for their difficulty in becoming employed. One of the discussions at that time was precisely whether the recessive labor context, with low-quality jobs, and the excluding social context, were the macro-social causes of the employment problems for young people, or whether this was effectively a problem limited to the young with low qualifications and to the new production demands (Moura Castro, 1997; Morrison, 2002; Filmus, 2001; Gallart, 2000; Jacinto, 1999; Cinterfor/ILO, 1998). The subsequent years showed that the deterioration of the world of work was a main obstacle to the labor insertion of the young, given that the economic recovery resulted, though moderately, in a better outlook, as shown below.

At the same time, *employability* was defined in several sometimes conflicting ways. This was reflected, for instance, in the discussion about the kind of training needed for labor insertion. Various approaches considered this to be the minimum skills required to perform well in a certain occupation, while for others it included the knowledge and essential skills to perform well in the social and civic spheres. Thus, while some advocated for specific competences adjusted to the labor market demand, others defined the key knowledge as a series of transversal competences, set in motion in problem solving, which included reading and writing, calculus, ability for organization, self-evaluation, critical reflection, etc. (Gallart and Jacinto, 1997). From this perspective, among other arguments, the limited characteristics of the training programs that were only associated with training for a specific trade were called into question, as *employability* was considered to be closely related to formal education.

The programs have achieved various degrees of development and permanence in different countries; at times they were ephemeral, depending on the government in office and, in most cases, on the external financing of multilateral banks. The evolution of the various programs is indicative of the role they played in the country within the education-labor sphere and as a form of State action, even regardless of political ideologies. A good example is the Projoven²⁵ program in Uruguay, which has been financed by the Fondo Nacional de Empleo²⁶ for over twelve years and coordinated by a tripartite agency: the Junta Nacional de Empleo²⁷. A study (Jacinto, 2009) showed the permanence level of both this mechanism and the institutional network which it set in motion throughout three governments with different political orientations. This continuity was associated with several factors: its limited scope, the tripartite consensus on sustaining its financing, its uniqueness in terms of vocational and job training possibilities including courses, internships and labor intermediation, and its good insertion results.

3. The employment policies of the 2000s

The region began the 2000s with an acute crisis resulting from the adjustments made in the 1990s. In those years, income transfer programs aimed at the most critical situations and the highest poverty levels started to be implemented. They had a new characteristic: subsidies were "conditional" on meeting certain requirements. While some views consider that this perspective contributes to skill development, showing, at the same time, interesting results in terms of overcoming poverty (World Bank, 2007), critical views hold that "the poor are granted a social protection floor, but they are excluded from real participation" (Rambla I Marigot, 2005).

With the economic recovery, changes in the general perspectives of employment policies were set in motion. Even though arguments based on market inefficiency and the necessary

²⁵ Translator's Note: Pro-youth.

²⁶ Translator's Note: National employment fund.

²⁷ Translator's Note: National employment committee.

deregulation of the labor market belong to views akin to those predominating in the 1990s, critical views on those approaches also arose as a consequence of their results and the changes in the political trends of several governments in the region.

Therefore, several governments assumed policies with re-distributional goals based on a social and citizen right expanding perspective. This was shown both in new economic regulations and the repeal of labor laws passed in the 1990s, which made employment contracts more flexible (ECLAC, 2007). Policies focused on “rights” were promoted, aiming at overcoming, at least in the discourse, stigmatizing views and those placing the burden of the responsibility on poverty itself. As suggested by Bendit (2008), in this paradigm, the personal, social, economic, cultural, and political needs were defined as *rights* and were closely related to social inclusion. A return to a Universalist model, referred to as a *basic universalism* of which the (revalued) State must be a guarantor, was thus posed. However, this model differs from the one which fostered the development of educational and social systems during a large part of the 20th century. Even though this new universalism does promote, on the one hand, the widening of education, social protection, and quality job systems, it does not usually associate them with comprehensive development policies but with specific actions. Even though it goes beyond the approach suggesting an extreme focus on vulnerable groups, it tends to propose a new kind of broadened focus on “anyone in need.” In addition, as suggested by some authors (Minteguiga, 2008), the use of the adjective “basic” assumes an emphasis on basic conditions of reproduction.

In the specific terms of employment policies, a model subsidizing the unemployed shifted to one based on “activation”, that is, the idea that beneficiaries have to perform an activity (from a “job” in the State or private areas to a vocational training course or the organization of a micro-business), depending on the amount received.

Two notions, to some extent opposing, concur on this “activation” (Rambla I Marigot, 2005). One of them holds that it is the response to the changing times, while the other finds in it a new regulation method. In the first perspective, activation responds to the individualization of inequalities and, consequently, of social rights. This requires engaging the poor in their own personal progress, and the community in the development of social programs (“the social capital”) (Kliksberg and Tomassini, 2000). In this regard, the activation involves developing measures which do not merely remain in the subsidy sphere (which creates dependence and poverty), but become incentives to participation, so that individuals are able to actively build their approach to employment. The other view acknowledges the emergence of subjectivities upon the blurring of social structures and the weakening of the major drivers of social mobility in the 20th century, that is, employment and education. It understands that the individualized treatment of poverty responds to the current contradictions between democracy and capitalism, and is typified as a “negative citizenship”, as proposed by Castel (1997) (Rambla I Marigot, 2005).

Two conceptualizations of activation thus stand opposed to one another. The first one sees labor insertion as the individual’s responsibility for their own personal progress, and involves the participation of the community in social programs. In the second one, the insertion is construed as a right. Citizens must be empowered to be active so that they can be given new opportunities in the face of social debt.

Regardless of the theoretical background, it is worth wondering about the potential impacts of activation on Latin America. It evidently does not mean, like in Scandinavian countries, support activation, that is, the creation of safety networks universally accessible to those who need them. The models that have been seen in the region are, rather, related to a limited activation in several senses: on the one hand, so-called “workfare”, that is, granting benefits conditional on certain considerations; and, on the other hand, the development, for example, of employment or labor qualification services reaching anyone looking for a job or willing to improve their status (which results in a horizon of actions in motion, which nevertheless remains distant in terms of its extension as a right).

With activation at the core, policies tend to privilege “tools to move in an uncertain market”, and “orientation” becomes one of the keys in the active employment policy measures. Similarly to the 1990s, many of the policies aimed at the youth are externally financed. Apart from providing funds, this financing poses specific trends in the program development. However, this fact does not necessarily imply imposing trends, but negotiations where views are manifested in some similar orientations and, in others, they adopt their own models based on the socio-historical relation systems of each country (Jacinto, 2009).

4. Recent mechanisms aimed at vulnerable young people

In the 2000s, the situation of the young on the labor market evolved relatively hand in hand with the improvement in employment levels. A recent report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) observes that the deterioration in young people’s insertion persists, as unemployment, informal employment, and precariousness affect them the most (ILO, 2007). The structural inequalities and the increasing segmentation strongly limit possibilities for overcoming exclusion.

The discussion themes resulting from the research reinforce the arguments that the young are hit by exclusion mechanisms in the Latin American societies regardless of their youth status (Weller, 2007; Salvia, 2008). Qualitative studies persistently show that social fragmentation, residential segregation, and weakness of a social relation network shape virtually insurmountable structural barriers to bringing about fundamental changes in the job access conditions of those young who live in poor neighborhoods (Jacinto *et al*, 2007).

The value of the secondary school diploma decreases with the expansion of educational systems. It is still useful to maintain the insertion opportunities in the formal sector, but it is a less protective measure against unemployment. Nevertheless, there are major differences between countries. In Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, within the economically active population (EAP), the tertiary education degree was the only protection against unemployment and the increase in informal employment. In these countries, the secondary school diploma is necessary but insufficient to get a quality job due to, among other factors, the expansion of that education level. On the other hand, in countries like Brazil and Mexico, people with lower education levels are more likely to be unemployed or informally employed. In addition, in countries such as Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Paraguay, the informal sector was expanded at the expense of the formal sector, without an increase in unemployment. Even though less educated people tended to shift the most from the formal to the informal sector, this shift also occurred for those who completed secondary school and those with tertiary studies (SITEAL, 2006).

Thus, secondary school credentials are augmented, leading to several paradoxes. On the one hand, they seem necessary to get a quality job, but, on the other, they do not guarantee it. This is due to the general deterioration of the youth labor market, but also because those who seem least to take advantage of the value of a degree on the labor market are precisely the poor. In effect, some studies show that, at least in countries with a significant expansion in education, other obstacles appear to prevail in the access to good jobs by poor youths who manage to complete secondary school (Jacinto and Chitarroni, 2009). In Bourdieu’s words (1998), this is a “deceived generation” facing a structural imbalance between ambitions and opportunities.

At the same time, viewing the youth as individuals shows that, given the loss of certainties concerning the multiple transitions they undergo, there are individualization processes in the insertion paths. These underscore both the adverse macro-structural determining factors and the institutional disaffiliation, and the changes in subjectivities revolving around not only work but also other life spheres, such the personal, family, and educational ones (Jacinto and

Millenaar, 2009). Social inequalities in resources and opportunities persist also in the individualized paths, resulting in wider or narrower biographic options.

Do the latest policies assume perspectives that acknowledge structural obstacles, and do they aim at improving opportunities to enter the formal market, strengthening institutions, and responding in a complex manner to the needs of the young, considering the latter as rights? To what extent do they take into account the new subjectivities of the young in terms of employment?

We will try to begin to answer these questions based on the study of the recent programs that we have conducted.

First, a shift in perspective can be distinguished in the diagnosis of the reasons for youth unemployment. The arguments of a human capital deficit or an inflexible labor market, even though they persist in certain groups, are beginning to lose strength against the arguments considering the problem from a wider and structural perspective.

Promoting the youths' longer permanence in the school system, either by means of regular education or through alternative ways is becoming a part of employment policies, in addition to the educational ones. In effect, by acknowledging the value of longer schooling years and education credentials, and even the democratizing effect of the schooling experience, many recent programs have supported formal education completion, either at the basic or secondary school level. Therefore, this approach responds to a view that values formal schooling and the acquisition of transferable skills for both society and work. In general, these programs are based on the youth and adult education system (EDJA in Spanish). Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico are some of the countries where actions are carried out in this sense through various ways and means.

However, it is worth analyzing the results expected from these mechanisms. How many youngsters manage to complete basic or secondary schooling through them? What is their quality? What institutional and pedagogical aspects should be borne in mind to achieve permanence and adequate learning results? More systematic research on the matter is required. These actions have complex goals, as the completion of primary school and particularly secondary school studies by the general population without them implies obstacles of various natures, both from structural and individual perspectives, including the traditionally weak quality of this training supply. Many institutions, both state-owned and NGOs, which participate in these programs, are usually precarious and lack resources. There are difficulties typical of the links between formal education, job training, and social programs. As regards students, hard living conditions, the need to combine work and studies, and even personal motivations that must be very strong to ensure permanence, pose difficulties.

These are some of the issues casting certain doubts about the students' permanence, their motivations, and the quality of their achievements, even though the efforts in question aim at providing broader opportunities than mere job training.

When it comes to the specific training and employment programs, two trends illustrated below may be recognized:

- Continued presence of structural constraints, and strengthening of training institutions, although the internal differentiation and the segmentation of mechanisms and services persists;
- An emphasis on guidance as a mechanism, approached on various political and conceptual grounds, ranging between instrumental perspectives and views stressing strengthened subjectivity.

4.1. Between redefinitions of the institution status and the persistence of limited perspectives

It may be held that a significant proportion of the new programs acknowledge that the current situation of the labor market and the country's production structure are the greatest determining factors for job opportunities. Employment quality becomes a characteristic which is emphasized by some programs addressed to the young, together with the concept of "decent work" coined by the ILO.

Studies of the impact made by some job training or intermediation programs show that providing first good-quality work experiences to young people from low-income households may contribute, to some extent, to breaking down barriers between labor market segments, and to improving those youngsters' opportunities (Jacinto 2008, 2009). This is especially the case with programs addressed to young people from middle-low or poor sectors (though not extremely poor) who have completed secondary school. These programs include vocational training (on many occasions service-oriented), social and labor guidance and intermediation with companies offering decent jobs. Examples include programs like PREJAL from the ILO and Entra 21 from the International Youth Foundation.

However, in general, social and labor segmentation pervades the circuits of access to good jobs. The initiatives to enable first good-quality work experiences for vulnerable youths have attracted little interest from the business world. There is a significant gap between the profiles of youths who are privileged by companies in the formal economic sector and those of young people who are covered by social programs (in terms of their formal education levels, competences, places of residence, etc.).

In addition, not all the programs assume the provision of quality jobs to the young. The limited creation of jobs, especially decent ones, has resulted in a continued promotion of youth micro-businesses as a quick fix for youth employment issues. Supporting youth enterprises seems essentially to be a way out of job scarcity. However, there has also been segmentation with respect to self-employment. On the one hand, middle-class youths with high education qualifications choose the so-called "second-generation freelance jobs", for example, in the IT area, thus obtaining monetary and symbolic rewards. Many informal jobs, such as those related to cultural management and/or expression, are valued by young people who choose these creative jobs in the face of uncertainty. Some youth programs have successfully promoted these kinds of initiative. On the other hand, in the case of those young people with low formal education levels, programs drive them to become entrepreneurs "out of necessity" and not due to a "calling". The available studies show that these micro-businesses usually have high failure rates. The perspectives addressing youth entrepreneurship, especially in programs aimed at poor young, still contain many simplifications. In most cases, they are isolated programs providing training or initial subsidies which are not based on adequate regulations fostering the continuity of enterprises or enabling links to wider value chains (Tockman, 2003). In addition, they promote youth social capital development from perspectives that do not consider the structural and institutional complexities of the problem at hand. From a different approach, some programs have stressed the importance of fostering a personal and social development strategy based on partnership and cooperation, and on using people's capacities and creativity, both individually and collectively. This leads to a development policy where actors themselves are mobilized. Even though interesting experiences sometimes ensue, the processes are not without difficulties.

There is still segmentation in actions. The programs of a "micro-business promotion" type are usually aimed at either urban or rural youth who have the highest poverty levels and the greatest difficulties in obtaining quality jobs. In contrast, programs offering internships or support for finding jobs in the quality formal market are aimed at youths in relatively better conditions.

The new approaches are also directed at strengthening the institutional status of the job training offered by social programs. In effect, during the 1990s, mechanisms sought to contribute to a diversification and renewal of the vocational training supply, adopting a demand-driven approach. At present, programs are usually related to a permanent institutional status, and are either developed in the framework of regular vocational training institutions (vocational training centers, technical schools) or associated with them. Examples of these trends include the takeover of the Colombian youth employment program by SENA²⁸, and the strengthening and participation of regular vocational training centers in training and employment programs in Argentina. This approach aims at a stronger institutional status, even promoting further social dialog with the participation of business and trade union actors. Nevertheless, this commitment to an institutional status and to social dialog can only be observed in programs aimed at employment itself. Programs of a more social nature, such as those supporting micro-businesses, show more heterogeneity in the participating actors, from social organizations or movements acting in the social economy sphere to small neighborhood organizations. Even though some experiences stand out, this is a path of greater institutional weakness further removed from quality training and employment circuits.

4.2. Guidance as a program mechanism

Guidance emerges as a mechanism related to an activation rationale. It is common for programs geared towards youth employment to include a social and labor guidance module either during or after the technical training itself, or in its place. This kind of guidance has been consolidated thanks to notions based on “providing tools to handle one’s career pattern”.

Without quality work experiences, many young people cannot deal with codes, roles, and usual routines in the labor sphere, and, on many occasions, these are the causes underlying the lack of access and loss of jobs, due to the dissatisfaction of both young people and employers. In some way, the diagnosis of the lack of information as one of the obstacles to youth labor insertion is present in this perspective.

However, the problem is far more complex. The consequences of over two decades of job deterioration, the greatest urban segregation, violence, no significant improvement in living conditions, and the emergence of large-scale criminal networks associated with drug-trafficking, have had a strong impact on young people’s perceptions and attitudes to employment. This outlook has modified the relationship with the work sphere, which, in former stages, was marked by the so-called “work culture”. Some authors (Perez Islas and Urteaga, 2001) suggest that there is a workplace decentralization in the configuration of youth social identities, and this attitudinal change is reflected in the “low motivation to work” displayed by some youths. Thus, there is a change in the conceptual frameworks, based on which the youth labor insertion problems, from “training needs” to “willingness to work”, are addressed, as stated by Mauger (2001). This new diagnostic element poses the risk of implying a new version of attributing responsibility for the problem to the individual (Tanguy, 2008).

Numerous guidance mechanisms have appeared, , generally courses supplementary to job training, which include purely instrumental perspectives (such as the preparation of résumés, advice on how to find a job) and broader approaches to help young people to recognize the rules of the labor game, its rights and duties, and to learn how to project themselves in terms of learning and working. In general, qualitative studies show that the young value their guidance experiences and find them useful, especially when their difficulties are more serious (Jacinto, 2008).

The available Latin American research papers suggest that social and labor guidance may contribute to broader subjectivity processes as regards labor and even educational inclusion (Dávila, 2003; Abdala, Jacinto and Solla, 2005; Jacinto and Millenaar, 2009). It may contribute to

²⁸ Translator’s Note: Colombian learning service.

providing tools to “make decisions based on reflecting upon the conditions of one’s own actions”, according to Giddens.

Nevertheless, the contribution of guidance to social and labor inclusion is not independent of the approach adopted. More comprehensive perspectives support express ends, such as the promotion of rights, a high level of personalized care and a close follow-up. They suggest combining institutions and various actors in support of the development of personal appraisals and actions plans, as well as the job search. In turn, they promote individual reflection capacity and the construction of institutional and collective supports.

This approach only be found in some Latin American examples. However, the “instrumental” and limited nature characterizing many other experiences pays little attention to the need for appealing to a marked personalization and to the central role of training institutions in that approach. An individual’s capacity to “manage their own transition to adult life” depends on the society’s structure of opportunities and the role of institutions in that mediation. At a time when traditional modern institutions are being weakened and fragmented, the structuring of opportunities is influenced by the concrete ways in which each institution (school, training center, company) to which youths are related displays its perspectives and approaches to labor and social inclusion. It is worth studying the institutional mediations and supports needed in the State policies to act accordingly on subjectivities, and the structural conditions that make it possible to find improvements in society’s structure of opportunities. From this perspective, social, educational, and employment policies, as well as the social interventions seeking the construction of citizenship, must be based on systemic, institutional and subjective criteria.

5. Final thoughts

This paper has already discussed shifts in perspectives and emphases dominating the policies for the insertion of unemployed youths with low educational levels between the 1990s and 2000s. Changes are generally related to different views of the State’s role and the institutional status of vocational training, as well as diagnoses emphasizing different aspects of the reasons for youth employment difficulties. Some central shifts refer to the passage from a subsidiary State to a new State regulation; from the institutional status of job training as a “market” to job training as a component in a vocational training system; from a perspective stressing “the training needs” to another stressing “the guidance needs”. Nonetheless, the changes in approaches are not homogeneous: various mechanisms co-exist eclectically, and the conceptualizations about the core issues are not the same: employability, activation, and guidance are some of the concepts with various meanings according to the political and socio-cultural perspectives. Even though in this decade there have been policy alignments to improve structural conditions, which are based on the rights perspective, segmentations and views which individualize the issues also persist in concrete actions.

The current emphasis on providing bridges to good jobs is opposed to acknowledging that the scarcity of decent jobs is a structural obstacle exceeding the specific policies. The extent of informal employment challenges vocational training and constrains the enforcement of labor laws (Gallart, 2008).

In this arena, there seem to be many “strong-willed/unrealistic” perspectives of the possibilities for connecting youths with good jobs, which do not acknowledge the constraints imposed by the difficulties in carrying out actions jointly with various actors, as well as the social replication/reproduction and discrimination in our societies. Programs dealing with job training for vulnerable youths aim at democratizing training and, of course, they are an important part of any inclusive development model. However, the approaches of a structural-preventive type, although present in the policies for improving education and policies seeking to relate economic growth to increased employment, are far from overcoming structural inequalities. As regards

vocational training itself, in general, there remains a parallelism or a segmented rationale between regular training, addressed both at sectors of already-included workers and at competitiveness, and a supply oriented to lower-income sectors, low-cost or free courses whose connection to the quality labor market is relative. Therefore, certain programs aimed at the poorest people, far from expanding the youths' "spaces" and socializing environments, "anchor" them in their exclusion settings, without adding synergy in the creation of social inclusion mechanisms. For example, there was an attempt to insert youngsters with vulnerable profiles into large companies which faced, on occasion, discriminatory practices. When State programs seek to alter recruitment practices in the production world, regulations and incentives are not enough.

In spite of reformulations and changes in perspective, in Latin American countries it is unusual to find experiences that acknowledge the complexity of what Casal (1996) has called the perspective of the "transition to active life". That is, the perspective that adopts multi-sectorial approaches to intervene in the improvement of youth labor transitions, including educational, housing, and employment policies; a perspective where the local space is acknowledged as a reference framework to define and associate actions with a strong social and contextual content.

The complexity of this problem requires a combination of structural, institutional, individual, and subjective dimensions conditioning the access of poor youths to good jobs and posing specific challenges to intervention strategies in this field. From academic spheres, many authors call for greater comprehensiveness in the approaches to these problems, to cite some: Casal, (1996); Walter and Pohl (2005), Salvia (2008), Jacinto (2008); Riquelme (2001), Herger (2008), Abdala, Jacinto and Solla (2005), Weller (2007). What are the bounds of possibility in fragmented societies with weak institutions? Some efforts to develop views associating the macro-social sphere with the institutional and subjective levels provide theoretical and conceptual tools which propose an approach for researching the youth transitions and the possibilities to intervene in favor of greater social inclusion.

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Impact of the mechanisms on youth labor pathways. Between social reproduction and opportunity creation

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the impact of specific job training mechanisms on the insertion patterns of low-income youngsters. It delves deep into a question that has been studied from various angles by previous research papers: how mechanisms supporting labor insertion³⁰ influence the subsequent careers of the youths who participate. It focuses on an aspect that has been hardly addressed in our field: how both the secondary school diploma and the access to specific job training mechanisms—in this case, internships and vocational training (VT) courses—are associated with the youths' subsequent jobs, according to the educational capitals in their homes of origin.

As pointed out in the Introduction, this research defines the mechanism's impact on the young in a broad sense, encompassing both the tendency to work (activation) and the access to a job and its quality, as well as other educational dimensions—educational permanence or reintegration—or subjective dimensions—related to social participation, self-esteem, etc. In particular, this paper deals with the influence on career development immediately following and up to one year after leaving the mechanism, in order to bring out changes in youths' situations at different times.

The investigation of whether the mechanism influences the spheres mentioned above is grounded on at least two theoretical and methodological stances. The first one is that the analysis of mechanisms must go beyond the input-output perspectives—such as studies on the impact of internships or VT courses on subsequent jobs—to examine career sequences with their successions of events and, at the same time, include other impacts apart from mere labor insertion. The second one is that, given the devaluation of the secondary school diploma on the labor market, those who complete that level but have a low social or educational background are affected more in terms of job access and quality than other secondary school graduates (Jacinto, 2006a). We wonder then if a mechanism that is specifically oriented to job training could contribute to increasing insertion rates.

2. Views on mechanisms

2.1. Investigating mechanisms from a pathway perspective

In our country, there are few studies on the participation of youths in mechanisms supporting insertion, especially vocational training. These are qualitative studies (Jacinto, 1998, 2006b; Gallart, 2000; Herger, 2008) which have agreed on the positive subjective views that the youth hold on these experiences. For them, the courses become spaces for social participation, where they acquire not only technical competences, but also personal and social ones (Jacinto, 2006b). However, studies concur on the fact that, in spite of this assessment, precarious resources and weak links between institutions and the labor market, together with the multiple disadvantages

²⁹ We thank Andrea Federico, who supported us in the processing and early analysis of quantitative data; Jorgelina Sasserá, who performed some further processing tasks; and Paula Ottolenghi, who collaborated on the editing of this text.

³⁰ As pointed out in the Introduction, by “mechanism” we refer to a specific training or experience either for work or at work.

of the youth, usually lead them to the informal sector of the economy as a labor insertion horizon.

Analytical approaches studying the mechanism's effects on the youth pathways in a broader fashion have been less frequent. According to the vast literature asserting that life-building experiences among youths —and even more so their labor insertion processes— are set in the context of a de-standardization of their biographical pattern (Biggart *et al.*, 2002, among others), we argue that the analysis of career pathways is the appropriate framework in which to examine the mechanism's impact.

First, the analysis of educational and labor patterns is a theoretical and methodological perspective making it possible to record the sequences of youth labor behavior in a temporal process framework. In general, studies of career pathways (Panaia, 2009) take the graduation or completion of studies (either secondary or university) as a starting point, and analyze continuities or ruptures of the succession of job-related events, and come to an end when youths manage to reach a certain stability level on the labor market. Nonetheless, and especially in populations like the ones considered in this paper, this possibility to determine both a beginning and an end in the reconstruction of their insertion patterns is hindered, to the extent that youths who leave secondary school early, start their careers at a very early age, or intermittently access the formality and job stability circuits, are included. Therefore, our perspective has not attempted to address career pathways considering that there must be stable jobs, or that the “transition” has a starting and end point. On the contrary, we understand that the relevance of studying pathways lies in the possibility to access a process-related analysis of the youths' patterns in a given life period. This is precisely due to the fact that young people's labor insertion patterns have acquired heterogeneous and irregular characteristics, even with the same structural conditions, as a result of economic changes and the weakening of institutions leading to the loss of social support and protection for individuals (Pérez Islas, 2008).

When analyzing such training experience in the framework of a process throughout time — related to a particular social and historical context, but also to the particular biographical pace of the pathways (Elder, 1994)—, the advantage that youths take from the mechanism may be understood with greater complexity. Introducing the concept of “mechanism's impact” involves adopting a temporal perspective, which compares various times in the youths' educational and labor patterns. Consequently, this paper will show that the training experience and the learning acquired from it may be translated, in the youths' subsequent career pathways, into an improved quality of the jobs they get, but also into activation and other social and subjective assets, such as the expansion of social capital or the construction of an occupational project in the future. For this more comprehensive view, we resort to quantitative data to find trends, and to qualitative data to understand processes more clearly.

Second, the analysis of youth pathways makes it possible to record the relevance of the various dimensions that have an impact on their experience. The youths' biographies make reference to the social context to which they belong, but also account for the individual pace set by their own decisions and constructions. Thus, it is possible to understand youth configurations by considering their positions in the social structure, but also their individual characteristics (Longo, 2008, Casal 1996). This involves recording both determining biographical factors (their socioeconomic and educational levels or places of residence, among other details) and their personal constructions and decisions, where subjective constructions play a significant role (for example, the meanings attributed by the young to work, their motivations, decisions, and strategies).

Youth transitions to employment arise as the complex result of these multiple dimensions (Walther and Phol, 2005). This paper will show the significant relevance of aspects such as the educational levels of the young or their families of origin in their construction possibilities. In addition, by means of some paradigmatic cases, we will see in the youths' biographies how individual socio-demographic characteristics, motivations, and the mechanism, interact to result

in an insertion pattern which makes it possible to better understand the trends found in quantitative data.

In this regard, examining mechanisms in certain sequences of the career pathways makes it possible to recognize typical impacts, but, at the same time, it makes it possible to view ruptures in biographical configurations, for example, upon opening up new horizons, as well as in work and even educational projects. We will thus provide “cases” illustrating the agency shown in personal decisions and attitudes added to the training and subjective experience in the mechanism.

There is some evidence collected in this regard. Some studies on the impact of Latin American programs (although they are not based on career pathways) show that it has been possible to moderately improve the labor insertion of trained youths, allowing for higher possibilities of access to formal jobs in comparison with other youths who did not participate in the program, at least in the short term (Jacinto and Lasida, 2010). In addition, in Argentina we started to see this trend in a previous paper, where subsequent career pathways were examined (Jacinto, 2006b). That paper showed that some young people managed to combine accumulated experiences allowing them to access some form of valued income generation (employment or self-employment), and, in some sense, to break away from a structurally predictable career pathway. Moreover, youth graduates valued the acquisition of specific knowledge related to a trade, as well as the access to a social capital and a network of social relations making it easier for them to find a job.

For the purposes of furthering these findings, the research, whose partial results are discussed in this paper, compared various mechanisms in terms of their impact on the youths’ career pathways, in the sequence from the beginning of their career development to a year after they left the selected mechanism.

2.2. Exploring relations between mechanisms and secondary school diplomas

The rupture with traditional forms of labor socialization —where people would learn to work with others, for instance, a teacher, someone from the family circle or directly in the first job, which used to be stable— has been an inevitable consequence of the deep changes in the world of work and the relations between education and employment. Until the rupture of that model, the school also contributed to labor socialization, not only in the case of technical schools, but also in general secondary schools due to their influence on the development of discipline attitudes which were strongly related to the capacity as student, but also as worker.

The weakening of educational institutions and their impacts in socializing terms, as well as the precariousness of the labor market, are currently key social elements to understanding those ruptures in the passage from education to employment. In addition, they have brought about the formulation of policies and programs supporting new transitions, in particular, of those people in more vulnerable social and educational conditions. In effect, at present, many youths from low-income sectors have few or no possibilities, in their daily experiences, to meet workers with quality jobs. They get unstable and precarious jobs, as shown in numerous previous papers.

Given the acknowledgement of the social value of secondary school credentials (“necessary but not enough”, as repeatedly shown by Filmus *et al.*, 2001; Miranda, 2008; Jacinto, 2006a, Salvia, 2008), recent State policies have focused on ensuring that youths complete that level, defined as compulsory in Argentina. In this vein, strategies to retain students in secondary school, as well as alternative methods, such as Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos³¹ (EDJA), and specific programs have been promoted. Nonetheless, the education debt remains huge. Barely half of adolescents manage to complete secondary school in due time and manner, and millions of workers do not have those credentials.

³¹ Translator’s Note: Youth and adult education.

To the above it should be added that recent studies show that those who have a harder time having their secondary school diploma recognized on the labor market are usually people from households with lower income or educational capital (Salvia, 2008; Jacinto and Chitarroni, 2009). Let us take, for example, figures from the 2006 EPH (permanent household survey). They show that non-poor youths with secondary school degrees have a lower rate (33 percent) of access to unregistered jobs. On the other hand, in the case of poor youths who have completed secondary school, that rate increases to 81 percent, which is very close to the rate for the poor youths who have not completed it (89 percent). As regards unemployment, poor people who have completed secondary school have higher unemployment rates than those who have not: 49 percent for the former and 30 percent for the latter. This is surely related to the fact that the poor who have completed secondary school have higher expectations and probably less urgency than those who have not completed it and have no option but to take on jobs with low qualification requirements. However, this situation is significantly different from the unemployment rate of the non-poor (around 11 percent), whether they have completed secondary school or not. These figures show that the educational effort made by the poor is far from being reflected in better labor insertion conditions. Reproduction trends prevail over educational credentials.

In this context, it should be pointed out that the impact of taking part in a mechanism, according to whether secondary school has been completed or not, is virtually unknown. Among other reasons, this is due, among other reasons, to the fact that State policies on this matter have focused on youths with lower educational levels, and to the fact that the vocational training offered in our country (in general, low quality training) has rather been a circuit of second chances for those excluded from the formal education system (Jacinto, 2008).

In addition, in a context of economic recovery such as the one experienced in Argentina since 2003, the question of the impact of job training mechanisms becomes even more relevant. Does the higher demand for qualified workers on the labor market in the last few years make it possible to provide greater value to the credentials obtained or to the knowledge acquired when participating in such mechanisms? How is that training associated with secondary school education in a context of labor market recovery?

We then depart from the following working hypothesis: for the poor young people who have graduated from secondary school, having access to mechanisms linking them to the labor world, either in the form of internships or initial or ongoing vocational training courses, may lead to an increase in their employability conditions and/or higher possibilities to access good jobs. This has been even suggested for other contexts, such as the European one, where in the face of a high secondary school completion rate, vocational training is challenged to adequately respond to the demand of non-tertiary post-secondary studies (McCoschan *et al.*, 2008), and the policies for the transition to the labor market develop numerous mechanisms to support young people in their career pathways.

We have sought to compare the impact of different types of mechanisms on the youths' subsequent career pathways, in order to define the set of individual, subjective, and institutional factors showing signs of positive impact in terms of labor and social inclusion.

Methodologically, this was a quanti-qualitative study (although it should be considered exploratory) of 106 cases of boys and girls between 19 and 29 years of age (coming from low-income households) who had graduated a year before from 12 selected institutions offering some kind of job training (in particular, internships in secondary school and vocational training courses). The youth graduates responded to a closed questionnaire and a semi-directed interview, based on a guide, about their career pathways before, during and after the training experience. The study aimed at spotting trends and constructing typologies and concepts. This article provides the quantitative data to show the trends found in youths' labor insertion, pointing out the differences according to the mechanism and socio-demographic variables. However, these data are essentially used to make up groups showing the insertion patterns and

profiles of typical youths according to the mechanisms, as suggested by Glasser and Strauss (1967). Some paradigmatic cases reconstructed from qualitative data are presented, as they provide a better understanding of how subjective and objective factors interact, as well as of the ruptures and bifurcations (Longo and Bidart, 2007) found in career pathways in relation to mechanisms. In particular, the focus is turned to showing how youths from households with low educational capitals³² who have completed secondary school manage to have that diploma recognized thanks to the mechanism.

3. Mechanisms under study

The first group of mechanisms under study comprises secondary school internships, generally associated with technical schools. They are a way of learning at work which supplements technical training. A paper in this collection proves that their impact, in the context of the rupture of labor socialization processes, exceeds that traditional purpose, and shows new meanings and influences on subjectivities and career pathways (see Jacinto and Dursi, in this volume).

A second group of mechanisms under study is made up of vocational training or specific job training, which sometimes adopts the form of (or includes) guidance and/or job intermediation.

General data about VT show that in the entire country, in 2008 there were 392,717 students enrolled³³ in 3358 centers. Most of these centers are “pure”, that is, State institutions. However, a proportion of those VT centers were created by signing agreements with other institutions (such as companies, unions, bishoprics, or town halls) which select the specialties and provide resources for equipment and materials. The centers’ relation with the organization signing the agreements has resulted in some innovative strategies in the context of local development projects, agreements with unions and/or companies, and associations with other social entities (Jacinto, 1997).

There are also youth job training projects developed by NGOs and supported by subsidies from national or international social programs. In this regard, previous studies (Jacinto *et al.*, 1999) have recorded some experiences with perspectives based on providing equal opportunities to the target population, which promote its social participation. But there have also been, and continue to be, many one-off experiments which are of low technical quality.

Some of these centers participate, in turn, in the execution of active employment policies supported by the national Ministry of Labor. In the last few years, they have included support to ongoing training courses with curricula based on competences (developed from sectorial networks), and the establishment of quality parameters for VT centers, among other policies. In recent times, from national programs or NGOs with external financing, components aimed at activation and social and labor guidance have been strengthened, emphasizing the relevance of “management by youths themselves” in the transition process (see conceptual matters in this regard in Jacinto, in this volume).

Now, in this range of mechanisms, we sought to compare their various types. Thus, we pose a question about the institutional models into which mechanisms are inserted, as well as their impact according to the model type.

Therefore, in the institutions providing internships, a differentiation has been made based on the mechanism’s level of integration into the curriculum and the goals of the internship within the institutional strategy (see Jacinto and Dursi, in this volume). In addition, the following has been distinguished in VT centers: “pure” State centers; centers with agreements with unions;

³² Whose negative impact on the educational opportunities which youths manage to access is widely proven in social research (SITEAL, 2008).

³³ Across the entire country, the students enrolled are mostly women: 62.6 percent.

centers with agreements with NGOs, either with a territorial or a religious background; and centers dependent on NGOs that develop programs without State financing (which involves greater autonomy in the institutional and curriculum definitions).

As is evident in the aforementioned distinction, the youths who participated in internships have generally completed secondary school. However, in the case of VT, the situation is more uneven. In effect, vocational training programs, especially initial trade courses, have been traditionally addressed to those who have not completed secondary school. Even when some part of these courses may require the completion of secondary school, it is not usual. The mechanisms were thus classified into five types, which may be placed within what we have referred to as “the vocational training and activation rationale” (see Jacinto, in this volume).

The five types, including the twelve institutions under study, are as follows:

1. Secondary school internship (INTERNSHIP): These are secondary school institutions offering students internships in companies;
2. Union Vocational Training (UVT)³⁴: These are courses developed in VT centers dependent on the respective educational jurisdictions, but, at the same time, associated with trade unions. Their certifications are valued within the qualifications valued by the companies of each sector, and institutions themselves usually participate in sectorial networks. Most courses do not require secondary school diplomas;
3. Vocational Training with a territorial/religious background (NGO): These are courses provided by NGOs, in some cases dependent on the respective educational jurisdiction (that is why they award approved certificates), and, in others, with a more informal development, subsidized by social programs. Nearly none of these courses require secondary school diplomas, although they usually promote the return to the education system by youths;
4. Guidance with Insertion (GwI): We include in this category an NGO developing VT programs, but specially focused on guidance and assistance in the insertion process. It is grounded on an activation rationale aimed at recently graduated youths or students in their last year of secondary school;
5. Pure Vocational Training (PVT): These are courses developed by vocational training centers generally dependent on the respective educational jurisdictions, but which have not formed an agreement with counterparts like in the two cases above. Nearly none of these courses require secondary school diplomas.

Below is the discussion of empirical data about the youths’ labor patterns, considering three milestones throughout time. Quantitative trends shown in the data gathered are examined, as well as some paradigmatic biographies illustrating how factors associated with changes in various moments are linked together.

First, the occupational status prior to the mechanism (T1) is compared with the status immediately following its conclusion (T2). Second, the occupational status is examined at the time of the interview (T3), which was defined around one year after the participation in the mechanism. There follows a comparison of the job characteristics according to the mechanisms in which the youths participated, seeking to investigate the links between the mechanisms and the insertion quality, as well as other impacts. In addition, this shows the various socio-demographic profiles of the young participating in each different mechanism type.

Finally, the question about the relationship between secondary school, the mechanism, and the youths’ current labor status is addressed. In this sense, we wonder about the extent of the impact exerted by the secondary school diploma, as well as by social origin, on the youths’ labor insertion, considering, within that relationship, the participation in a mechanism.

³⁴ The acronyms with which each type appears in the Tables are provided between parentheses.

4. What happened to youths immediately after the mechanism?

4.1. Changes in activity status

When comparing the situation of youths between T1 and T2, the most remarkable trend is an increased activity rate. This increase occurred across all groups, and is especially outstanding in those youths 21 years old and under (Table 1). To a certain extent, these results were expected. These are youths in an insertion process, who, as a group, generally increase their activity rates year by year, as shown by the data from EPH (permanent household survey) (Salvia and Tuñón, 2003; Miranda, 2008). In fact, youths between 22 and 29 years old already had much higher activity rates before entering the mechanism. An increased activity in women was also expected, but it is especially outstanding in the group between 18 and 21 years old, where the rate is doubled. It is precisely in this group where it may be held that the mechanism has had a greater influence on the tendency to work. Unemployment also increased slightly, but in T1 it was already relatively low: it increased from 6 to 10 cases (nearly 10 percent). This means that most of the youths who became active were employed.

Table 1: Distribution of graduates per status before and after the mechanism, according to age and sex, in absolute values and percentages.

Employment status	T1				Total	T2				Total
	Female		Male			Female		Male		
	18-21 years old	22-29 years old	18-21 years old	22-29 years old		18-21 years old	22-29 years old	18-21 years old	22-29 years old	
Employed	10 35.7%	9 50.0%	15 55.6%	23 74.2%	57 55%	20 71.4%	12 66.7%	19 70.4%	27 87.1%	78 75%
Inactive	18 64.3%	7 38.9%	12 44.4%	4 12.9%	41 39%	5 17.9%	4 22.2%	6 22.2%	1 3.2%	16 15%
Unemployed	0 0.0%	2 11.1%	0 0.0%	4 12.9%	6 6%	3 10.7%	2 11.1%	2 7.4%	3 9.7%	10 10%
Total	28 100%	18 100%	27 100%	31 100%	104	28 100%	18 100%	27 100%	31 100%	104

Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

It was worth wondering whether this increased rate of activity and employment was associated with the access to jobs through the mechanism. Did youths access a job by means of the mechanism or did they just keep their previous jobs or changed them? The first hypothesis is the one with the highest relevance. In effect, 55 percent got a job after the mechanism; 36 percent kept the jobs they had; and the percentage of youths who got new jobs in T2, having been employed in T1, is low: only 9 percent (Table 2).

Now, as observed, this significant influence of the mechanism on finding jobs varies according to age group and sex. The access to jobs particularly increases among the young, especially among younger women. Among women older than 22, the mechanism also had an important influence on getting jobs. Other data in our research make it possible to better understand the reason for this greater impact on female activation. On the one hand, men have higher activity rates from T1. But, on the other hand, male and female motivations to enter the mechanism vary considerably, especially in the different VT types. Men intend to improve their employment status, whereas women seek to learn something specific that is useful for work, as well as to obtain an opportunity for social participation, as shown in the cases presented below.

Table 2: Employed status after the mechanism, according to age and sex, in percentages

Employment status after the mechanism	Female		Male		Total
	18-21 years old	22-29 years old	18-21 years old	22-29 years old	
Got a job	80	50	58	37	55
Kept the job they had	15	41	40	48	36
Changed their job	5	9	2	15	9
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

Another characteristic influencing activation is the youths' educational level. In T1, those with lower educational levels had higher activity levels. In T2, there is a general increase in the activity rate, so that it becomes about equal for both groups (Table 3). Youths with lower education levels already worked, probably out of necessity, while in the case of those with higher educational levels, the mechanism fosters activation.³⁵

³⁵ The few cases of unemployment do not make it possible to detect trends, but they do show that unemployment is the highest among the less educated youths at both stages, and the gap becomes even wider in T2.

Table 3: Distribution per activity status before and after the mechanism, according to the educational level, in percentages

Employment status	T1		T2	
	Incomplete secondary school	Completed secondary school	Incomplete secondary school	Completed secondary school
Active	68	59	86	84
Inactive	32	41	14	16
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

Now, it is interesting to relate this result to the role that the household educational capital³⁶ (EC) plays in the increased activation between T1 and T2. In T1, the household EC does not seem to influence the activity rates (Table 4). After the mechanism, the activity increased significantly among those youths whose parents had a lower educational capital. This result is consistent with two issues: on the one hand, those who come from households with lower educational capitals are in greater need of work; on the other, a group of people with higher educational capitals remain inactive because they tend to continue studying.³⁷

Table 4: Activity status before and after the mechanism, according to the household educational capital, in percentages

Employment status	T1		T2	
	Household educational capital		Household educational capital	
	Low educational capital	Medium-high educational capital	Low educational capital	Medium-high educational capital
Active	56	59	88	74
Inactive	44	41	12	26
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

³⁶ The household educational capital was defined as the highest educational level of the parents. It is usually considered a *proxy* at the socio-economic level.

³⁷ Unemployment, as already mentioned, is low and, even though a greater family educational capital seems to be associated with a lower youth unemployment rate, data are limited to confirm that relation.

4.2. Which type of mechanism is more closely related to activation?

Now, do mechanisms have different impacts according to their type? Which type of device seems to be more closely related to activation? In this regard, results show a clear trend. Those who participated in internships or courses providing guidance and intermediation (GwI) stand out. In these youth groups, the employed ones increase most notably and the inactive ones decrease significantly (Table 5). This group includes the largest number of youths between 18 and 21 years old. For the rest, however, employment remained relatively equal. The group that participated in PVT courses stands out, as 2 out of 10 youths remain unemployed in both measurements.

Table 5: Distribution per activity/employment status before and after the device, according to the mechanism, in percentages

Employment status	T1					T2				
	Internship	NGO	UVT	PVT	GwI	Internship	NGO	UVT	PVT	GwI
Employed	23	62	84	70	46	61	76	84	62	100
Inactive	77	32	11	8	54	31	12	11	15	0
Unemployed	0	6	5	22	0	8	12	5	23	0
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

To sum up, job access increases especially among the youngest. Before the mechanism, women tended more to inactivity, and men to employment. After the mechanism, there was an increase in employment for both sexes, though it was more marked among women. This increase among women was essentially due to access to employment; while in the case of men, job permanence played an important role.

The youths who completed secondary school tended the most to shift from inactivity to activity after the mechanism. This would suggest that, for them, the mechanism acts as a trigger to begin a job. This is consistent with the fact that mechanisms of internships or those that support labor insertion (GwI) —through intermediation— have a greater impact on activation. In this respect, in the analysis of qualitative data, it was found that those youths especially valued the mechanism as it provided them with a direct bridge to employment and, even though they had not planned to work at an early stage, they were encouraged to do so, and thus feel satisfied.

In addition, the greatest impact on activation was found in those with higher levels of education and those from households with lower educational capitals. These are the first pieces of evidence showing the link for youth insertion between the secondary school diploma and the mechanism, which, as detailed below, operate by strengthening one another.

The youths' labor patterns offer evidence for understanding these links, as can be seen, for example, in the case of Gabriel:

*Gabriel comes from a household with a low educational capital (his mother completed primary school and works as a housemaid). He is 20 years old and completed his secondary school studies in a senior high school in the Greater Buenos Aires area. Gabriel did not work while he was studying, but he took the opportunity of doing an educational internship in his last year at school to gain experience and, also, out of an economic need in his family. He did the internship in an animal nutrition and health company, and then kept his position of laboratory technician as a permanent employee. Since then (2006), he has kept the same job and has a stable labor pattern in a company offering opportunities for professional growth. He states: ... **"I got the job thanks to the internship, because I did it right here. (...) I took an interest in the internship because I was going to be able to get some experience. I might not have kept the job, and then I would have had to look for another one, but anyway it was going to be like a letter of recommendation (...) It was a great experience because they opened my mind more (...) when it comes to the job itself, career development, dealing with people; in other words, it gave me a different view (...) And now I think I have the job I want to have"** (Gabriel, 20 years old, INTERNSHIP).*

In addition, the mechanism also influences the activation of some youths from households with low educational capitals who have not completed secondary school.

***Flavia, 20 years old, comes from a household with a low educational capital (her mother is currently unemployed and is a beneficiary of a social assistance program). Flavia could not complete her secondary school studies. Her labor pattern prior to the mechanism was characterized by a weak and intermittent relation to work (she got two petty jobs for a short time). She decided to participate in a training course of the GwI type, and immediately after finishing it, she got a formal job and for an indefinite period of time in a prestigious restaurant in the city of Buenos Aires. Even though Flavia already intended to work out of an economic need, the mechanism allowed her to get a protected job with a good salary, even without having completed secondary school. In addition, the mechanism allowed her to give a new meaning to her ambitions for a future professional career. After her training experience, Flavia started to value the possibility to get a "good job" and not to feel satisfied with an unprotected and badly-paid job. She asserts: "My goal was labor insertion. Beginning and completing the course to get a job (...). And here I got enough knowledge to start a job. I didn't know anything and I got enough training to work at a restaurant (...). I think that if I hadn't joined this course, my life would have been very different. Out of work. Actually, I don't know if out of work, but surely without the possibilities I have now."** (Flavia, 20 years old, GwI)*

For the rest of the mechanisms under study, even though the connection with activation in T2 is not so direct, the cases highlight key ways in which the mechanism works to promote entry into the labor market, especially in women. **Adriana's** case is different from the examples above due to her age (she is 29) and because, after the mechanism, the job that she got was neither formal nor stable. However, it is an interesting case to illustrate the situation of many women who are currently inactive and devote their time to taking care of their children and to their households. For them, vocational training may mean a rupture in their previous life projects, to the extent that it provides them with access to work experience, which, on many occasions, is far from the social mandate for women.

*Adriana stopped working when her first daughter was born 9 years ago. During all that time, she was not involved in any labor activity, and she dropped her secondary school studies and never completed them. She comes from a household with a low educational capital, and her husband, even though he does work, is not well paid. However, the family decided that she should stay at home. **After attending the training course (NGO), Adriana decided to start working a few hours a week to have her own money: "because I can't depend on my husband all my life". By means of the mechanism, Adriana could give work a new meaning, different from the one it used to have. For her, working is now a decision made on her own and associated with***

personal development. She confirms so as follows: “I used to believe that working was all about shutting up and putting up with everything. Keeping your head down and going on no matter what. In a humble family, you have to work. We are all raised like that. But, actually, it is not like that (...). Now, I want to finish secondary school, try to study something, graduate and be able to work, but for myself.” As can be seen, the mechanism has also driven her to complete her studies. Adriana feels that these decisions have encouraged her to picture herself as more than a housewife.

5. The current job and the mechanism: between social and educational conditioning

The quality of the youths’ current jobs (a year after they had the training experience) seems to be related to the type of mechanism in which they participated³⁸. Let us see the behavior of some key variables associated with job quality.

Size of the business: A year later, half of the youths who attended UVT, NGO or PVT courses are currently employed in small businesses. Among them, those who participated in PVT courses stand out due to the high influence of self-employment (1/3). On the other hand, those who participated in the GwI mechanism are employed in medium-sized companies, and those who have had internships now work for big companies. As can be seen, the impact of intermediation in these last two mechanisms seems to remain relevant one year after the course was completed.

Labor precariousness: Jobs without social benefits are more usual for those who have done PVT and NGO courses. In addition, half the graduates from UVT courses have registered jobs, a fact that may be deemed as a positive impact when considering that these occupations usually have a high rate of informal employment, such as the construction, electricity, and mechanics sectors. Registered employment increases significantly among those who have done internships and GwI courses.

Income: The youths who earn the most (over 2,000 Argentine pesos) are those who have done internships, a detail that is consistent with the fact that they have also completed secondary school, and that a large number of them have studied at technical schools. On the other hand, those who have done NGO or PVT courses account for the highest percentage of employed youths with an income below ARS 1,000. The highest tier of the middle-income section of the scale used (between ARS 1,001 and ARS 2,000) is accounted for by those who have done GwI and UVT courses. The employed youths that graduated from PVT courses are evenly distributed between the two income categories mentioned above.

Qualification level of the tasks: The respondents who have done internships are likelier to do jobs requiring technical qualifications. Among those who have done UVT courses, jobs requiring operational qualifications increase. For those who have done GwI and PVT courses, there is a higher proportion of non-qualified jobs. In the case of youths who have participated in GwI mechanisms, the low qualification of the jobs is related to age and to the fact that they are employed in the services sector.

The differences in the current jobs of those who participated in various mechanisms have allowed us to outline different configurations to be presented below.

5. 1 Job quality according to the mechanisms

INTERNSHIP: those youths who participated in this mechanism are usually employed in businesses with over 40 employees (70 percent). Nearly 40 percent of them hold the position of technical analysts (coinciding with the fact that they studied at technical schools). Out of the

³⁸ Some variables concerning the current jobs, which have not been previously stated, are also included here.

rest, some are employed in the services sector, or do technical and operational support tasks (janitors). A large majority (unlike the other groups, except for GwI) has registered jobs (83 percent). This is the group that is inserted the least into low qualification jobs and is least affected by over-employment (20 percent). They have the highest comparative wages (average: ARS 1,997.83), in spite of the fact that they are the youngest in the sample. Forty-eight percent of them have salaries/wages above ARS 2,000.

Union VT (UVT): The youths who participated in this mechanism make up the group where self-employment and family-based work make up the most common jobs (42 percent). Most of the wage-earners are employed in small businesses (42 percent), but companies with 6 to 40 employees are also significant (31 percent). Jobs as electricians/gas fitters/plumbers/mechanics, with operational qualifications, stand out in the construction sector. Most of them have incomes between ARS 1,000 and 2,000 (the rest is equally divided between low income and income above ARS 2,000). There are no cases of non-qualified jobs. The level of precariousness is polarized: while 52 percent has all the benefits, 42 percent does not have any. The latter situation is associated both with self-employment and family-based work. Over-employment is also significant (42 percent). This is one of the two groups (along with the internship one) with the highest income average (ARS 1,578.95).

VT with territorial/religious background (NGO): The youths in this group are usually employed in companies with up to 5 employees (42 percent), but the category with over 40 employees (28 percent) is also relevant, as well as self-employment. The percentage of operational level occupations accounts for half of these youths. In addition, over one third of them have non-qualified jobs, in various sectors, most significantly in trade and personal services. There are few qualified jobs. Most youths have unregistered jobs (nearly 60 percent), and this is one of the groups where this percentage is greater. This is one of the two groups where under-employment (time-wise) is more marked (nearly 43 percent). For the majority, incomes tend to be low (56.8 percent below ARS 1,000), and this is the group where the salary average is the lowest (ARS 1,157.78).

Guidance with Insertion (GwI): Youths are mostly inserted into companies, where medium-sized ones (between 6 and 40 employees) prevail. According to the training provided, the hotel and restaurant/fast food chain sectors prevail, as well as jobs related to gastronomy, such as waiters and cooks. This group stands out as it has the highest registered employment percentages (90 percent), as a result of the institutional effort to connect them with this kind of job. This piece of information is highly relevant when compared to other demographic groups of a similar educational level and age in the household survey. In addition, it stands out due to the fact that half of them come from households with low educational capitals. Also, most of these youths work over 45 hours a week and their incomes are strongly located (72 percent) between ARS 1,000 and 2,000. Their salary average is ARS 1,286.45.

Pure VT (PVT): One out of 4 youths in this group are independent workers; and they mostly do non-qualified tasks (40 percent). This group is affected the most by unregistered employment: 7 out of 10. In addition, there is a high proportion of over-employed youths, but there is also a similar proportion who work less than 35 hours a week (in both cases, 4 out of 10). Incomes are placed in the two lowest categories: 45 percent earns less than ARS 1,000, and the other 45 percent, between 1,000 and 2,000. The salary average is among the lowest: ARS 1,238.64.

As can be seen, the youths' labor insertion in T3 appears to be linked to the mechanism in which they participated. However, it is worth wondering whether the socio-structural variables traditionally linked to job opportunities are also linked to the mechanism, and whether that is the reason why this influence is found.

In effect, there is a significant link between the type of mechanism accessed by the youths and their socio-demographic profiles. Below we present the outstanding characteristics of each group³⁹.

5. 2. Youth profiles according to the mechanisms

INTERNSHIP group: It is made up of 40 percent of women and they are mostly younger than 21 years old; nearly all of them have obviously completed secondary school and 60 percent of them come from families where at least one of their members has completed secondary school.

UVT group: They are nearly all male and over 22 years old. Many of them have parents who are working in the sector of the course where they were trained. These are two main pieces of information for understanding the behavior of this group on the labor market: on the one hand, nearly all of them have completed secondary school and, on the other, 2 out of 3 come from families where at least one of their parents has completed secondary school. Another feature among these youths is their tendency to do more than one course.

NGO group: It is made up of a higher proportion of women than men (6 out of 10), and ages are varied, even though youths of up to 21 years old prevail slightly. In this group there is a subgroup which has completed secondary school and another which has not. This is the group coming from households with the comparatively lowest educational capital: around 7 out of 10 come from households where neither parent has completed secondary school.

GwI group: This is mostly characterized by youngsters who have completed secondary school and are up to 21 years old. Two out of three people in this group are women. A proportion of over 50 percent comes from households with low educational capital.

PVT group: Nearly the entire group is made up of male youths older than 22; 7 out of 10 are male and are divided into two groups in terms of educational level: half of them have completed secondary school and the other half has not. From the point of view of family educational capital, these are youths who, almost completely, come from low educational capital households, and this is the group where this feature is the strongest.

Even though this description of dominant profiles is not a general characterization of the audience of each mechanism, it reflects a certain predominance that has been validated in the interviews with institutional directors. However, even though the population is relatively homogeneous in some types of mechanisms, it was more varied in others.

5. 3 Quality of the current jobs per mechanism, according to the youths' profiles

When associating the job quality with the youths' profiles, the following is found:

- In INTERNSHIPS, a good insertion quality coincides with the group of highest educational levels and capitals in the sample;
- In UVT, the insertion quality is also relatively good, especially regarding income and, to a large extent, the job formality. This is also a group who has usually completed secondary school and comes from households with middle educational capitals;
- In NGOs, precarious jobs with low wages predominate, and this is the group with lower social and educational profiles, even though a large part has completed secondary school;
- In GwI, the insertion quality is very good, especially regarding access to registered jobs (not so good regarding salary levels), and even though this is a group that has

³⁹ Bear in mind that the cases selected were all youths from low or middle-low income households.

usually completed secondary school, half of its members come from households with low educational capitals;

- In PVT, insertion is the most precarious, which coincides with the highest number of youths coming from households with less educational capital, even though a proportion of them has completed secondary school.

Another point that is worth highlighting is that insertion quality is also associated with sex. Thus, in T3, women are more affected by the lack of social benefits (66.1 percent of men pay into their pension funds, while 51.5 percent of women do so), by under-employment, and low salaries/wages, where they are over-represented (salaries/wages below ARS 1,000: 47 percent of women and 22 percent of men).

Thus, the data show a high relevance of social reproduction found both in the type of mechanisms in which youths participate and the quality of their subsequent labor insertion. That is, inequalities in the access to mechanisms persist in labor insertion. Nonetheless, it is worth wondering whether all the aforementioned socio-educational variables have the same influence, and, in particular, how relevant the association between the completion of secondary school and the mechanisms is in these groups of youths. This question will be addressed below.

6. Job training as a booster of the value of the secondary school diploma

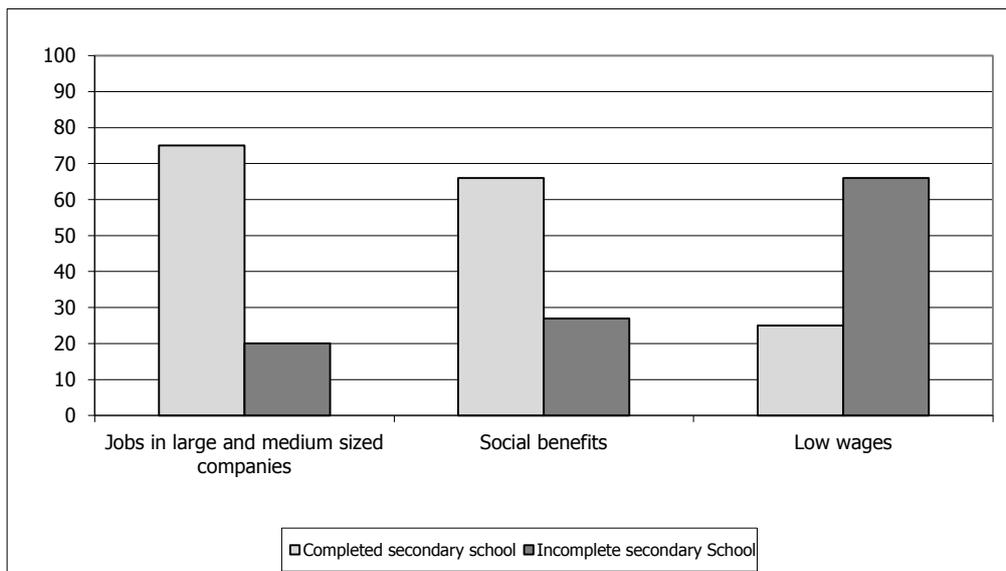
As stated at the beginning of this paper, one of the main research objectives was to observe the role of the secondary school diploma in insertion in T3 (current job) and its relation to the mechanism.

First, an influence of the secondary school diploma is found, as expected, on the type and quality of the current job. Thus, the completion of secondary school appears to make the first essential distinction between young people.

As shown on Graph 1, those who have completed secondary school tend:

- To be employed by large and medium-sized companies (75 percent versus 20 percent of those who do not have that qualification);
- To have, in a higher proportion, social benefits (66 percent with pension contributions versus 22 percent of those who have not completed secondary school);
- To earn higher wages (while 66 percent of those who had not completed secondary school earned less than ARS 1,000, only 25 percent of those who had were in the same situation).

Graph 1: Quality of the youths' jobs, according to their educational level

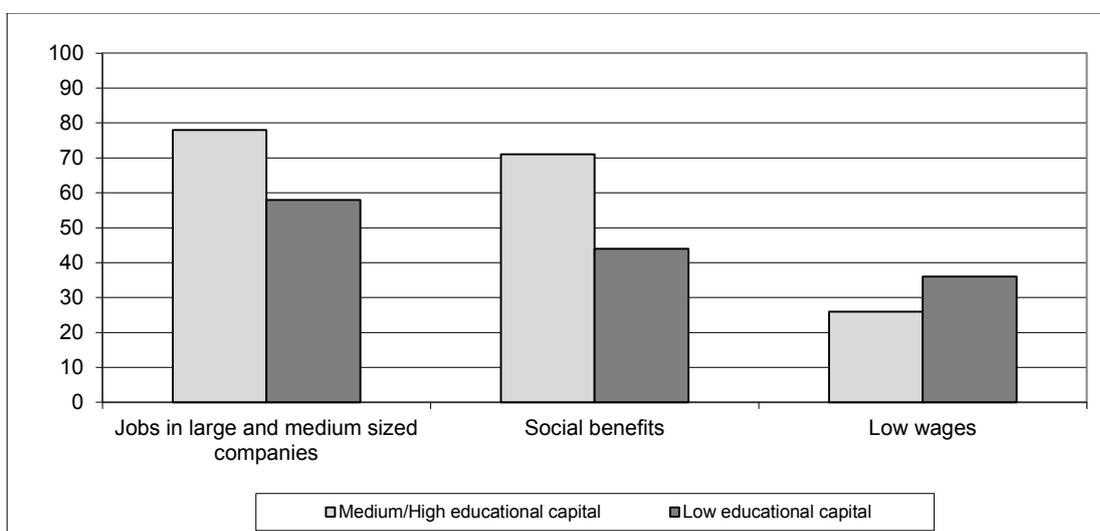


Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

In these cases, those who completed their studies at technical schools were in better conditions.

Second, the household educational capital also plays a significant role. Thus, youths from households with medium and high educational capitals (MHEC) tend to have better quality jobs than those who come from households with low educational capitals (LEC). As regards the size of companies, those who come from MHEC tend more to work in large and medium-sized companies, and the percentage difference from LEC youths is 21 percent (78 percent for MHEC versus 58 percent for LEC). Regarding job registration, those who come from LEC households are 26 percent less likely to get registered jobs (44 percent for LEC versus 70 percent for MHEC). Regarding income, youths with various educational capitals have similar incomes, but, for example, among those who earn the least, the difference per household educational capital is 10 percent (meaning that 36 percent of LEC are low-earning versus 27 percent of MHEC). These differences are shown in the graph below.

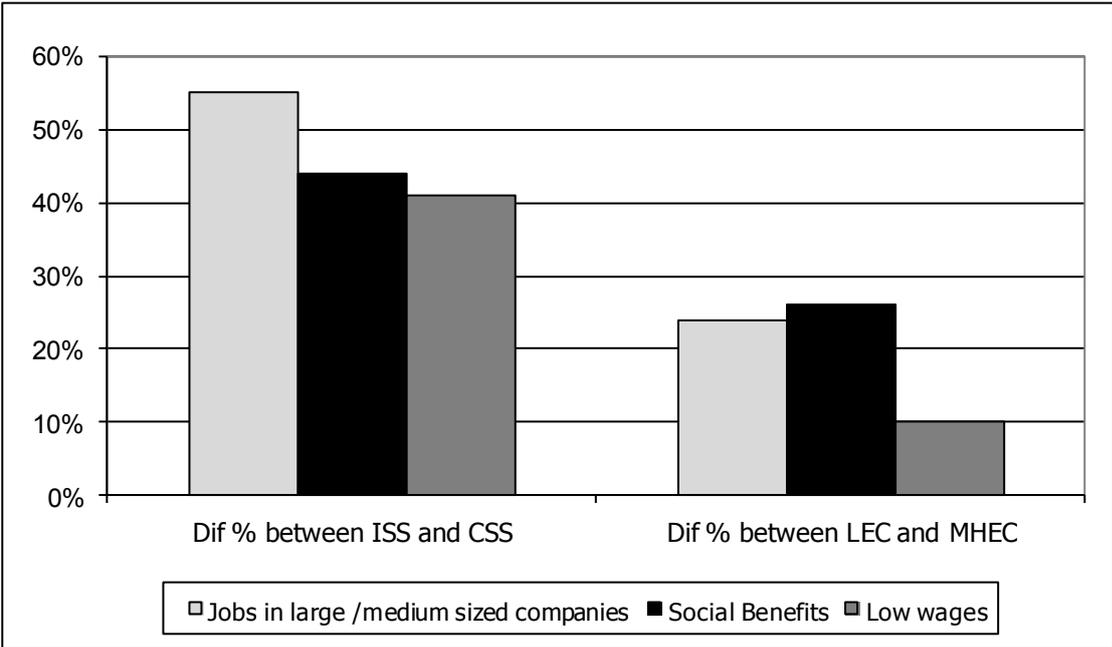
Graph 2: Quality of the youths' jobs, according to their household educational capitals



Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

What is most noticeable as regards the influence of the household educational capital is that it is not as crucial as the youths' educational level. Thus, we set out to compare both variables. A strategy for doing so is to compare the percentage differences among groups (recommended by Glasser and Strauss, 1967) with regard to the job quality variables. As can be seen in the graph below, the comparison between both percentage differences shows that the influence of either the completion or non-completion of secondary school on the quality of the current jobs is much more considerable than that of the household educational capital.

Graph 3: Differences in current jobs, comparing youths with or without secondary school diplomas, and low or medium/high household educational capitals, in percentages



Source: Database of the *Trayectorias* study

- ISS: Incomplete secondary school*
- CSS: Completed secondary school*
- LEC: Low educational capital*
- MHEC: Medium/high educational capital*

As already seen at the beginning of this paper, there is plenty of empirical evidence of the strong influence of household educational capital on the youths' labor insertion (Siteal, 2007; Perez, 2008, among others). We then wonder:

What aspects play a role in decreasing the role played by the young respondents' households? Without a doubt: the completion of secondary school. However, several issues must be stressed in that regard.

As already suggested, if the general trends of the Household Survey data are considered, the completion of secondary school, when coming from a poor household, is not enough to widely increase the possibilities of access to employment and, in particular, to quality employment. However, this is not the case in the sample of youths under study: those who came from LEC

households achieved better insertion than the general trends of the labor market would have predicted.

Is the mechanism therefore exerting some influence? This seems to be suggested by the data obtained when comparing the group under study with the data from the permanent household surveys regarding poor youths who have completed secondary school. Added to this, the qualitative data of our research confirm the ruptures caused by the mechanism in the youths' labor patterns. Thus, out of all the cases under study, a third of them (36 cases), who completed secondary school and came from low educational capital households, managed, with the support of the mechanism, to improve their labor status and to access jobs of a higher quality than would have been predicted.

7. The secondary school diploma and the mechanism: new strengths in youth capacity

Presenting some paradigmatic career pathways will make it possible to show how the secondary school **diploma** and the mechanism reinforce each other, strengthening both the objective opportunities to access good jobs and changes in the youths' decisions and agency. That is, by providing new "resources" and the capacity to mobilize them.

Below are presented the case studies of youths who have participated in a UVT experience and who, prior to the mechanism, showed unstable and precarious labor patterns. The advantage that they take from the mechanism lies in the possibility to significantly improve the labor pathway they already started. The training makes it possible to specialize technically in a particular trade and to make a quality leap in the sequence of jobs.

***Gastón** (27 years old) managed to complete secondary school in 2000 in a technical school in the city of Buenos Aires. The highest educational level reached by his parents is incomplete primary school. He started working as a builder while he was attending primary school. He kept that trade intermittently, thus resulting in an unstable and precarious labor pattern, with a low income. In spite of the technical training that he had, it is the mechanism that allowed him to reach a turning point: in 2004, he did a home electricity course. After the course, he could join a chain of self-service hardware stores as a "formally employed" salesclerk and stock replenisher, where he still works in an ongoing fashion. The course certification, added to the secondary school **diploma**, drove Gastón to start an accumulative labor pattern. This is reflected in his outlook for the future, where he owns a **decision** to continue his professionalization in the sector. He asserts so as follows: "**actually, I now intend to continue improving professionally and to be able to get an even better job. I'd like to do the other electricity course, the level two one. I'd like to have an even better career development.**"*

***Sebastián** (25 years old) also graduated from an industrial secondary school in 2001. He has always lived with his mother and brother. His mother did not complete primary school and works in a hardware store as a cleaner. After an unstable sequence of jobs (mostly informal ones: office boy in a hardware store, builder, casual electricity-related jobs), in 2006 he did an electricity course. With that certificate, he could join a maintenance company as a registered employee in 2008. He still has that job, which he got through a newspaper advertisement and which allows him to cover his study expenses, as he has already started studying at university.*

In both cases, it is seen that the VT course served as a "booster" of the secondary school **diploma**, by means of the specific training that it provides. The youths themselves acknowledge this: "*I got the job I have thanks to the course. If I hadn't done the course, I wouldn't know many things about this job; I wouldn't know them to that extent...*". (Sebastián, 25 years old, UVT).

A similar case is found in a young man who did a course in a PVT mechanism.

Francisco, 23 years old, managed to complete secondary school in 2002. In a vocational training center in the city of Buenos Aires, he did two courses related to IT. These certificates allowed him, in 2007, to get a registered job as an IT technician (through Internet recruitment). Francisco comes from a household with a low educational capital; he started his labor pathway at an early age, but only with this last job could he stabilize it. The course not only allowed him to advance his knowledge, but also to gain an official certificate. This diploma, together with the secondary school **diploma**, accorded him extra capital to be better positioned in his job search. In Francisco's words: "to me, the most important thing is the certificate. It is a way to prove what you know".

In spite of the low educational capitals in their families, the cases of Gastón, Sebastián, and Francisco show that participating in a VT mechanism makes it possible to achieve greater recognition for the secondary school diploma. For these youths, having completed secondary school was not enough to get a quality job; that was achieved when VT is added.

In addition, the mechanism fosters the continuity of studies, and strengthens the youngsters' decision to obtain a university **diploma**. This is shown in several of the youths interviewed, especially those who participated in UVT mechanisms. The course provides them with information, **but, at the same time, allows them to develop a professional identity driving them to continue training themselves**. This is stated by another young man: "The course was very good, in fact, as I signed up for the course, I felt like continuing studying (...). Until then, I was at a loss, I didn't know anything, I had no training, I had nothing... **if you ask me now what I do, I'll answer you: I'm an electrician, that's what I do.**" (Rodrigo, 27 years old, UVT)

In addition, the VT mechanisms seem to result, for youths who have completed secondary school, in job-linking experiences and in an occupational project due to the affiliations formed with institutions. The youths' *social capital* is extended by those experiences and allows them, in some cases, to have more resources and agency in their career pathways. The mechanisms thus cover a wide range of advantages supporting a bifurcation in the youths' labor patterns.

Lautaro (28 years old) completed secondary school in 2007 after a fragmented school experience. He lives with his mother, who completed primary school and, as she is currently unemployed, is a beneficiary of a social subsidy plan. His father died when he was very young. In 2007, he did a PC assembly, repair and optimization course for social consolidation, which was offered by an NGO VT center. As a result of the course, he started working in that institution, at a community workshop repairing and selling PCs. The course not only taught him a trade, but also provided him with a space in which to carry it out and to contribute to the work of the community. In fact, thanks to the course, Lautaro discovered a service calling **allowing him to redefine his future horizon**, among other things, because now he plans to follow the social work course of study: "I want to generate social work and it's like I apply it all to IT. I like the job I have now because it's a community one: repairing PCs for those who need them and to do so in a slum. It is very nice to have that possibility; I love it. Now I want to become a social worker".

Viviana (27 years old) completed secondary school in 1998 and completed up to the second year of a primary school teaching course. She lives with her husband and two daughters. Until she started her own family, she had always lived with her mother and brother. Her mother did not complete primary school and works as a cleaner in a hardware store. Viviana started working at an early age in a sequence of jobs on the informal market. In 2007 she did a computer studies course in an NGO VT mechanism. Through this mechanism, she got a microcredit aimed at promoting micro-businesses. With it, she opened a store selling diapers and baby items, which she still owns. In this case, the mechanism provided her with the contacts necessary for developing her enterprise. Viviana not only started her own project through the mechanism, but also fulfilled her wish to get a job which allows her to have enough time to also raise her daughters. **The financing obtained gave her the necessary resources (and extended her agency) to develop a previously conceived project**. She asserts so as follows: "thanks to the microcredit, I have the job I always wanted (...). I love a job like this, dealing with people... and the independence it gives you".

8. Final conclusion

The initial question in this paper concerned the impact of mechanisms on the youths' labor patterns in the year following their training. What does the mechanism contribute? We may assert, based on the data presented, that after the mechanism (in T2), youths show a greater activation and insertion into quality jobs than expected based on their socio-demographic characteristics, especially with certain mechanisms.⁴⁰

The typical profile of youths participating in each mechanism varies both in educational and social terms. Even though some mechanisms bring together certain profiles, especially in terms of family educational capitals, others show greater diversity. A year after the mechanism, jobs are related to the type of mechanism in which youths participated.

Although reproduction trends can be observed, the main finding is that the mechanism supplements secondary school completion, and contributes to breaking away from the social reproduction for some youths from low educational capital households. This group, which, according to the ongoing household survey data, has the greatest difficulties in having its secondary school diplomas recognized, behaves differently when studied in this research. In effect, in these youths, the influence of the household educational capital on the labor insertion quality is not seen as straightforwardly as would be expected.

For that reason, the quanti-qualitative data tend to show that the mechanism makes it possible to boost the secondary school diploma for youths from low educational capital households, as their job-related behavior a year after their participation in the mechanism is better in terms of quality (registered jobs and salary levels) than the behavior of this group on the labor market as a whole (Jacinto and Chitarroni, 2009). This result may be understood in a context of labor market reactivation, where overall unemployment has considerably decreased along with labor precariousness, even though it still persists, accounting for 38 percent. Thus, the influence of the mechanism makes it possible to put the youths from low educational capital households, who have completed secondary school, in a new position in the "line" of available jobs. This impact will nonetheless be constrained by the demands of the production structure and by the quality of the available jobs.

Consequently, this study, even though it is restricted to the group analyzed, makes it possible to show that mechanisms, far from being merely "poor alternatives for the poor", may, in certain favorable conditions, contribute to the creation of opportunities that the secondary school diploma cannot provide on its own, in the framework of educational credential decline. The mechanisms of training for work—or at work—when added to the secondary school diploma, can potentially provide knowledge and specific competences, as well as bridges to quality jobs, in other words, "resources". Although the scope and representativeness of the data in this study are limited, this issue should be studied in broader populations, due to the clear signs that those results may contribute to policies for secondary and post-secondary education, as well as for vocational training.

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⁴⁰ This situation is reinforced when the labor pattern shows ongoing training processes. For example, those who work in the construction sector and have done UVT courses account for a higher proportion of registered employment.

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The place of *decisions* in the educational pathways of young people who are about to graduate from “popular high schools” for youths and adults

By Alenka Mereñuk

1. Introduction

It is presently acknowledged that one of the main challenges of the high school level is to guarantee quality inclusion for all the young (Jacinto, 2006a). Although the increase in school attendance rates has seemed to make selectivity and elitism fall into oblivion, specialists agree that while such a broad approach has enabled the most disadvantaged population segments to be included, it has presented the challenge of providing significant learning for a population that is heterogeneous and increasingly unequal. Thus, one may observe a tension between the democratization process regarding access and the difficulties faced, especially by low-income teenagers and young people, to remain in school, complete the full cycle⁴¹ and achieve quality learning.

Likewise, specialists point out that as a consequence of the employment process becoming growingly precarious and informal, secondary education, even though it is a precondition for gaining access to higher quality jobs, is a tool that has become increasingly insufficient (Filmus *et al*, 2001). It may thus be said that high school not only weakened its capacity to assist in the upward social thrust but that it no longer represents a common transition path of the young in their becoming adults (Jacinto, 1996), as such educational credentials no longer guarantee a successful insertion into the labor market.

Nevertheless, various studies (Dussel, Brito & Nuñez, 2007) indicate that in spite of the deterioration in the value of high school diplomas, education still upholds a fundamental symbolic value. Indeed, it may be acknowledged that high school completion represents, especially for those youngsters coming from poor households, an important subjective step in their lives, one that is linked to social acknowledgement, personal achievement and/or valuation of their skills to enhance their potential labor condition and address the continuity of their tertiary/university studies. However, what is the weight of those acknowledgements, achievements and valuations for the actual possibilities of the low-income young to complete high school? Do they assist them in making decisions in the sense of facing the structural deterministic factors? And, last but not least, what is the impact of the institutional models, which indeed encompass living conditions and the subjective experience of the young in their functioning framework, on their completion of high school?

In this vein, the present article aims at reflecting on the place of *decisions* to be made by young people about to graduate from the privately-managed ‘popular high schools’ for young and adults⁴²⁴³ on the construction of their educational pathway. The present study understands the notion of “path” or “pathway” as a complex process with a crisscrossing of multiple factors, both objective and biographical, related to the socio-productive context and the living conditions of

⁴¹ Although it is acknowledged that during the 1997-2006 period both the senior high school enrolment rate and the number of graduates increased, the graduates’ growth rate was below that of those who enrolled (Cappellaci & Miranda, 2007).

⁴² “Bachilleratos Populares para Jóvenes y Adultos”, in Spanish.

⁴³ The information relates to popular high school diplomas for young people and adults provided in privately managed public schools in the Province of Buenos Aires. Both experiences are part of the field work I carried out for my master’s thesis called “The place occupied by popular high school diplomas for young people and adults provided in privately managed public schools in the educational pathways of low-income young kids of the Buenos Aires suburbs” and supervised by Claudia Jacinto. I am presently in the final stages of this work.

the young, with individual strategic factors. The aim is to analyze the impact of structural limitations and subjective factors on the relationships of young people who attend those popular high schools and the educational system. Although the acknowledgement of structural variables will allow us to understand the impact of the economic and social context on the educational pathways, a focus will be placed on restoring the acknowledgements, achievements and valuations leading the youngsters, even under adverse conditions, to make decisions and take action on a specific reality. It is worth mentioning that this rationale does not avoid the impact of economic and social conditioning factors in the making of the subjectivity of the young while acknowledging the action framework of the agent, but rather takes it on board. From this standpoint it becomes a useful tool aimed at “understanding why people have an impact on the world even when they are the *object* of such an impact” (Ortner, 2005).

2. The popular high school diplomas: a new alternative of secondary education for young people and adults

The secondary education of young people and adults is becoming increasingly relevant in today’s educational agenda. To a large extent this is due to the fact that a significant proportion of young people do not complete their high school education through the standard channels and thus move to other sources, like adult education, with characteristics that are more appropriate and flexible with regard to their own possibilities. Indeed, one must acknowledge the advent of new educational formats proposing to develop alternative models to bring on board the young and adults coming from more vulnerable population sectors. They try to cater for more flexibility in the homogenizing concept of teaching by trying to cross the exclusive and excluding hurdles of those schools carrying traditional formats (Tiramonti, 2007). Likewise, given the lack of conceptual clarity and hence of that of policy and pedagogy, that has historically been the hallmark of the educational format of the young and adults, they are committed to preparing a peculiar definition of the young-adult subject resuming his/her linkage to the educational system after years of neglect. Such a definition has allowed them to provide the institutional and pedagogical model with a specificity framework that defines the boundaries of the educational practice they bring about.

The privately managed popular high schools for young and adults have been designed and organized by various social movements. Although the first experience took place in 1998, there are now more than 40 such schools that are functioning, essentially located in the Federal District and the suburbs of the city of Buenos Aires. The *recovered*⁴⁴ companies, territorial organizations and trade unions are the social background where such educational practices are being introduced. Although the proposal made by all such high schools has been to create a new Department of Social and Popular Management Affairs in charge of coordinating, together with the social movements, all the corresponding educational services, the high schools were recognized by the Private Education Department in the Province of Buenos Aires. Although such official recognition seems like a unique achievement in the social movement to foster popular education self-management experiences in the field of public education (Elizalde, 2008), which also goes to overtly show the participation of these organizations in the construction of public policies, both the granting of a specific status and the funds to pay for teachers’ salaries remain a pending issue.

The profile of most teachers combines university training and lengthy experience advocating for neighborhood organization rights. Both are key aspects when it comes to combining training and political tasks as required by such a self-managed educational process. The students in turn come from low-earning segments of society and were essentially born in those neighborhoods where the high schools are located. Although the population is heterogeneous in terms of age,

⁴⁴ Translator’s note: These are companies that have been taken over by their labor force after the original owners were not in a position to continue operating them.

gender and their original family and socio-economic condition, they share the same schooling pattern both fragmented and marked by retakes, withdrawal and dropout.

One of the newest issues introduced by these popular high school programs is the relationship between the school and the communities, as these are considered “self-managed social organizations”. In this vein, the school is not only integrated to the neighborhood but is also offered as an alternative prompted by the social movement driven by the social movements and designed as a function of the social and educational needs of the community. From this perspective, school is a place where different knowledge elements, i.e., academic and popular, live together: and it is this tension and linkage that generates richness in practical life. Among the goals set, besides the training task as such, we may find the shaping of political subjects who are capable of having a demanding and active community participation.

3. The contribution made by the “pathways” perspective

The richness of the notion of “path” comes from the fact that such a path becomes a theoretical and methodological tool leading to the study of the biographical pathway of individuals in a holistic manner (Graffina, 2005), by analyzing the structural limiting factors that condition the field of possibilities of the subject as well as the subjective factors mobilizing decisions and specific action modes. However, the weight of each of the factors is still being debated among the various players. Thus, the points of view upheld by social determinism overlap with those assigning more value to the socializing institutions and those that give priority to the reflective dimension of the subject as a responsible agent taking ownership of his/her own biography (Longo, 2008).

Recently, various studies analyzing the pathways of the young (Walther & Phol, 2005; Casal 2002, Bidart, 2006) have put more emphasis on the combination of structural, institutional and individual elements, stressing motivation and expectations as key aspects of such a combination. Such studies consider that the decline of the institutions and the disaffiliation mechanisms, typical of modern societies, have an impact on the segmentation and destructuring of biographical pathways. Under this assumption, they acknowledge that the pathways of the young have specific characteristics in the framework of the individualization process (Giddens, 1995) in which individuals are pushed (Beck, 1998) or obliged (Castel, 2003) to become accountable for their own decisions and to take ownership, in an autonomous and reflexive way, of their own personal circumstances. However, in Latin American contexts, although research points out the importance of the subjective factors in the pathways of the young (Jacinto, 2006b), some specialists (Robles, 2000) notice that the individualization process is asymmetric because of the economic and social conditioning factors providing resources, expectations, inhibitions and authorizations. Following this theoretical point of view, it is accepted that under less favorable conditions, when there is no institutional regulation and yet pressure to find new integration channels, the range of choices becomes constrained, therefore putting tension on the reflective capacity of the subjects.

In this vein, a pertinent question concerns the relative importance of each of the subjective factors in the construction of the educational pathways of the youth from low-income households. It also invites us to think about the different degrees of thoughtfulness and the actual leeway that young people have when creating their own life stories. That is why the purpose of this paper is to analyze the impact of structural limiting factors (such as the socio-economic ones, the income of the original home, the educational level, the education opportunities and the place of residence) as well as the subjective factors (especially motivation, expectations and appraisal) in the educational pathways of the young people who are about to graduate from high school. Although the analysis will build a link with the objective conditioning factors and the biographical elements, focus will be placed on acknowledging the motivation, expectations and appraisal underpinning the decision-making circumstances, and which ones, in

the face of structural determinism, provide particular meanings to the educational pathways of the young. Likewise, the institutional variables of the model proposed by the popular high school diplomas will be examined: the idea is to find out whether they have contributed, and if so how, not only to retention but also to (future) graduation from high school.

4. Educational pathways: the *rationale* behind the decisions

The young people who re-connect with the educational system as adults follow a various pathways, usually marked by retakes and dropout. As indicated, the diversity of such pathways is due to a unique combination of socio-economic, family, institutional and subjective factors. In this vein, analyzing the pathways leading to popular high schools has allowed us to observe that given the structural conditioning factors there is a "*logic*", a particular rationale, that links the decisions made by the young vis-à-vis their educational pathway. As a function of their motivation underpinning their educational pathway, the expectations they have regarding completion of their high school studies and the appraisal of the place of such a popular high school in the possibility of completing their secondary education, three different *logics* have been identified.

The first one is the **tactical evaluation** guiding the decision-making process. As such, under the *instrumental logic*, the educational pathway and, within the latter, the possibility of completing high school becomes a means to achieving certain ends related to "becoming a worker" and the possibility of improving their labor condition. From this perspective, the popular high school will not only allow them to graduate, and hence to get their high school diploma, it will also provide conceptual tools that will be taken advantage of as a function of the goals pursued. In the *affective logic*, **the family ties** are the ones that are at the root of the decisions linked to the educational pathway of the young. In this case, resuming their studies and, in particular, the appraisal of the high school diploma is related to the possibility of "being acknowledged" inside the family. That is why in this case the flexibility of the institutional model proposed by the popular high school becomes a key element to the extent that it can provide for retention and completion of the secondary cycle even though the structural factors at the root of their previous exit from the educational system have not changed. Finally, in the *revenge logic*, the decision-making process is linked to the need **to overcome economic and social determinism**, thus the achievements are personal in nature and the challenges are a sign of strength. That is why getting the secondary diploma would not only reinforce their "being" (in itself) but also the fact of crossing the hurdles scattered almost throughout their educational pathway becomes a stimulus for overcoming adversity.

Table 1. Underlying logics in the decisions made by the young regarding their educational pathway

Logics	Motivations underpinning the educational pathway	Expectations behind a high school diploma	Appraisal regarding the place of the popular high school vis-à-vis the possibility of completing the secondary level
Instrumental	“Being” at the workplace	Improving working conditions	Completing secondary education and acquiring the conceptual tools that will strategically assist them in improving their condition
Affective	“Being” in the family	Family acknowledgement	Completing secondary education thanks to the flexibility of the institutional model and the personalized follow-up during the teaching-learning process
Revenge	“Being” oneself and by oneself	Overcoming the social and economic determining factors	Completing secondary education thanks to the curriculum model and to the teacher-student relationship, and also taking advantage of a series of theoretical and practical tools to reflect on the reality and to act individually on such a reality

Source: Own research, based on interviews carried out for the purposes of this study

4.1. The instrumental logic: Hernán’s case

“I have been made with my father’s blood, my father had made me for a factory, I am a worker, I have a worker’s mark here”.

Hernán is 27 years old and has the weight of a worker’s tradition on his shoulders. His parents not only met while working in a factory, but most of their labor history was linked to working in the industrial sector. Since he was a child, the desire to become a technician, “to be a worker” and to become an employee in a company seems to have had an impact on some of the decisions that marked the course of his educational pathway.

He managed to complete grade school without any problems. His parents had decided to make the effort for Hernán to start his studies in a private school because they considered that to be the best option in the industrial area of Pacheco, the place where he had lived since he was born. However, in fourth grade they had to move him to another school because he was the victim of bullying by his classmates.

“I started at the age of six, in 1987 more or less, and I completed up to third grade and well, as it was a private school and there were many wealthy kids and I was from this neighborhood, I was discriminated against. Then they beat me up. We were playing soccer and they beat me up as one could never imagine and almost broke my chest by kicking it and at that point my parents pulled me out of school and took me to a public school in Pacheco, where I finished up to seventh grade”

Starting high school went hand in hand with one of the first decisions relating to his goal of working in a factory. Before finishing the last grade of primary school, Hernán asked his father, who had been working at the Ford factory for over 15 years, to register him for the examination to get into the school belonging to the automotive factory. Although his father offered his help to make sure he would have a place in that school, Hernán did not want any help, he wanted no string pulling and in the name of dignity and effort he took the examination... and failed.

"I wanted to be admitted at the Ford school and my father managed to get the tests, he talked to a teacher at the school who was a friend of his so that I wouldn't have to undergo the exams but I wanted to take them, by all means, because my honor and my dignity come first. My father wanted to kill me. "Just pretend and go there anyway, you don't have to pass the test and you'll be accepted anyway". "No, dad, I don't want to do that". I took the test and failed. And there and then I told him to register me in a standard technical school."

In any case, the wish to take advantage of high school as a means of getting ready for a future enrollment in the industrial sector came about by registering in a technical school in Benavidez. The theoretical courses in the morning and the practical courses in the afternoon do not seem to have brought about many difficulties during the first high school years. However, at the end of his fifth year in high school he had to retake for the first and only time in his academic career. Hernán attributes that failure to an unfair teacher who preferred the kids who lived in that neighborhood and discriminated against those coming from the periphery of the neighborhood. In spite of feeling once more discriminated against, he chose to sue that particular teacher and continue in the same technical school where he repeated that fifth year and started his sixth and last year of high school. However, the unforeseeable nature of things forced him to make a decision for which he thought he was already prepared:

"And then came the dispute of the year 2000-2001, when the bank accounts in dollars were frozen. In those days my father was working and they started firing people at Ford and they fired those who sided with the shop stewards and my old man was on the side of a shop steward and so he was fired. Well, they didn't want to pay him severance pay, a big problem. He spent almost six months trying to survive, also with the help of my sister, who was working. Then I said: 'I've had enough of being like this', because we never wanted for anything, we were working people, we were always saving money. 'I'm going to start working', I told my mother. 'No, you still have another half year to go', 'No, mom, I can't take it anymore, seeing how my brothers and sisters barely have enough food, I can't keep on seeing my sister suffering like this, or the others'. And I started looking for a job."

Without his parent's agreement, Hernán dropped out of school and looked for a job in "big industry". Although he did not have his high school diploma, he was confident that what he had learnt throughout those years of technical schools would be fine, and he was also confident that effort, responsibility and shrewdness would be good tools for him to start as a worker. He spent almost eight years outside the educational system, and during that time he tried to achieve his goal by working for a temping agency. An interesting fact is that although in the beginning he would accept any kind of job that was offered to him, after a few years Hernán was willing to do anything to grab the chance to get into a factory.

A friend called me and he said that they were hiring in a dye factory, looking for people to unload a truck. I called the agency and they told me "if you want to, just come". Well, I went that day, I arrived at the factory, there was a 30-meter container, it had 1300 dye sacks weighing 30 kg each, with black dye. It took us six hours to unload it, but I started to work and a boss who was looking at me saw that I was really enthusiastic. At the end of that day he said: "very good job, would you like to come another day? Because we're going to need help." I went back and worked in the warehouse, that's how I started. At noon they were celebrating the end of the year and I stayed and I started to meet people and that was the starting point of my work there. Well, when they didn't need me any longer, they told me "we're going to take keep you in mind because you work very well".

After a year, the agency called him because the dye factory needed him again. In that company, not only did he get better paid jobs, but also higher category jobs. Hernán discovered that

improving his labor conditions depended partly on his sense of responsibility, but to a large extent, on the strategies that he could implement in order to be in the good books of the workers at the factory.

“Inside the factory, I started changing the type of work and my category. I started with category ‘D’, the lowest one, I was paid 1.51 an hour, it looks like everybody started that way, it was my way of starting from the very bottom, until I started to be trusted by everybody. Afterwards I even talked to the daughter of the factory owner, we had a sort of confidence or friendship, because I am a very sociable person. I like it. Before, when I was a kid I wasn’t like that. But over time I learnt that in order to have something in life you have to be a little sociable, and I tried to be as sociable as possible.”

However, in spite of the fact that the salaried job goal seemed to have been reached, Hernán saw that promotions inside the factory had a cap because he didn’t have a high school diploma. His desire to keep on growing in his job, added to the interest in the possibility of developing a tertiary degree, motivated him to go back to school. The possibility of finishing in a technical school had dwindled because he only could go to a school that would offer night classes. As such, his choice of finishing in the popular high school was linked, in the beginning, to the schedule possibilities offered by this kind of educational proposal. The concerns he had of starting in a new school, plus his fear of being discriminated against one more time, were very quickly dispelled.

“When I arrived, I was again afraid of being rejected, I was nervous and on top of that, it was a philosophy class. I looked at everything and I was extremely nervous that day because everybody was looking at me, sort of strange, and nobody would talk to me. I sat on my own, in a corner, then, when they started to talk to me, they started asking me about the way I dressed. I asked them if it was bothering them that I came dressed like that (with a gothic style) and they said ‘no’, they said ‘let’s learn a little bit about you, just as you’re going to be learning something about us.’”

The popular high school little by little started becoming a space of belonging for Hernán. In principle, one may acknowledge its value in the sense of participating in a space that provides for everybody to put his/her own personal subjectivity on the table and, in turn, get a collective result which is something more than the sum of its individual parts.

“I value the freedom of speech they allow you in high school, I love the freedom of speech that lets you be the way you are, that doesn’t put any boundaries on how you have to be dressed, or how you have to talk or anything... I will start here to be more sociable and human, you learn to be supportive, and you learn to get along well with people, to see that we are all equal in this society, regardless of whether you are rich or poor.”

However, it is worth noting that it is the teaching–learning model itself that becomes highly significant in the framework of Hernán’s pathway. Indeed, popular high schools prepare a certain pedagogical task that fosters a learning style that stimulates critical reading of reality and also provides for continuous thoughtfulness in practice. That is why teaching tries to transcend common sense by proposing different theoretical frames that are placed vis-à-vis the experience of the students themselves. From that standpoint, experience is acknowledged as a known world, an anchor from which you may build a concept and denature reality. In turn, it is proposed as a resource for action, as action itself brings about an analysis, a reflection that puts execution in play.

Hernán was able to acknowledge that moving through high school allowed him to acquire knowledge of trade unionism history, which is linked to the emergence of Peronism. In that vein, the conceptual tools added new elements to his labor experience so that he could reflect on the situation and act accordingly. From then onwards, he strategically started to get close to the shop steward by using his knowledge on Peronism to get support inside the factory and to get a promotion in the workplace:

“And my social skills are useful for work, after talking to a shop steward who is a Peronist, I talk to him about Perón, and he is really thrilled with me and then I put him in my pocket, I use him as a weapon to have the support of somebody inside the factory. It is a way of putting people on your side, so to speak, I prefer to have my future guaranteed, to have a contact here inside for a future promotion, that sort of thing”.

The work carried out by the popular high school regarding the promotion of critical thinking and reflection on reality becomes an important tool in the framework of the instrumental logic. As such, one may acknowledge that although for Hernán, popular high school cannot bring about a learning tool that strengthens his “being a worker”, it still is a place that fits in with his own motivations and hopes of improving his labor condition: on the one hand the fact of belonging inside the workplace becomes an important and necessary factor for him to remain and to graduate; but, in addition, the opportunity provided by this way of learning allows him to thoughtfully leverage the acquired knowledge and put it to work in an action that will guarantee that he will achieve his goals.

4.2. The affective logic: Gastón’s case

...“and then, as for my family, they will wait for me to get my diploma and then they will say ‘now you have your high school diploma and, well, you know, now I love you more’ ”.

In his twenty years of life, Gastón moved house several times as his family searched for better living conditions. In spite of the fact that these moves were responsible for his continuous changing of schools, he managed to maintain a continuity in his educational pathway that seems to have positively distinguished him from the rest of his family. That is why his position, or rather his “being” in the family is related to the value placed by all his relatives on his learning capacity and the expectation they have that Gastón is the only one who can get a high school diploma.

Gastón’s school pathway started in a town called Moreno, where he went to first grade when he was six years old. When he finished third grade, the family moved to another town, San Fernando, where his parents made the decision to enroll him in a school in the town of Carupá. He only spent two years at that school, because again, owing to his parents’ work, he had to go back to his old school in Moreno, where he completed his sixth grade. Economic needs moved his family to the neighborhood of Pacheco, where Gastón managed to finish seventh, eighth and ninth grades in a school in the Los Troncos neighborhood. His educational pathway shows that his personal wish to remain within the educational system was positive in enabling him to adapt to changes in neighborhood, school and friends, and provided him with the continuity and completion of all of his basic general cycle in normal time schedules.

“I got everybody’s support, all of the time, to go to school, because everybody had followed it to such and such a grade and as they saw that I was the only one making progress, my family would say ‘you’re the only one who’s studying’ and they wanted me to complete my cycles”.

During those first years in school, Gastón had to live with some fears that placed tension on his educational pathway and, hence, on the acknowledgement of his relatives. Although he counted on the support of his family, and had a certain confidence in his own academic achievement, the fear of repeating a grade became a key instance. Indeed, repeating any of the grade school cycle years would have been for him tantamount to failure, a frustration that could threaten his position in the family.

“I always took responsibility for going to school. In other words, whenever I went to school it was on my own, because I wanted to. Until first or second grade, well, my mom used to send me. But I always liked going to school. But a few years before finishing grade school I told my mom ‘well, mom, I’m going to finish grade school, you see, and if I don’t have to retake any grade, I’m going to

continue in high school, and if I ever have to repeat a grade there I will not continue because I don't want to repeat. I just didn't want to repeat."

Once he had overcome all of his fears and fulfilled the expectation of being the member of the family that would spend the most years in school, at the age of 15, Gastón went to senior high school. Because of the area he was living in, he decided to enroll at the nearest school in the Pacheco neighborhood. However, the stigma of having moved around, plus the economic limitations, led Gastón to skip school too many times and therefore to waste a year, and drop out of school.

"Sometimes I had a bus ticket and sometimes I didn't. Sometimes I walked there but it would take one hour on foot, but I still walked to school. Sometimes I skipped school for a few days and once I could only skip another five times but it happened that I quit school because my niece in Merlo was celebrating her birthday and then I didn't manage to get a bus ticket to get back home that week, and when I finally made it home, I had exceeded my absences. They gave me another chance at school, but the following day I had physical education in the morning and I overslept, and when I finally made it to school they said 'no, because you skipped physical education, you can't come back anymore', and so I didn't".

Along with his fourth move came a new change of school. In the town of Merlo, Gastón managed to complete his first and second senior high school years without any problems. In spite of his academic achievements, the poor economic condition of his family forced him to get a job. Until then, and thanks to the fact that his father was a bricklayer who had taught him the trade, Gastón had done petty jobs to get some cash for his personal expenses, but because these were short-term jobs over the last three years he had managed to successfully manage his academic and work responsibilities. However, in September, i.e., three months before completing his third senior high school, Gastón had to start working in a construction company and although in the beginning he still entertained hopes of continuing to study, the workplace claimed all his permitted absences from school. Once again, his exit from school was linked to structural conditions, only in this case he didn't drop out because there were no resources, but because there was a pressing need to find a solution to economic problems.

It is interesting that "losing regularity"⁴⁵ does not seem to have been considered a "failure" for Gastón. On the contrary, it may be understood that the fact of not being entitled to any further absences was the lesser of two evils for him when compared to repeating the year. In this sense, one could think that such a condition protected him from frustration, i.e., it avoided putting on his shoulders the burden of failure, not only in school but essentially within his own family.

The year after he dropped out of school, he moved with his mother and his brothers to the Las Tunas neighborhood. The separation of his parents called for his increased participation on the labor market, and that is why he spent almost two years outside the educational system. Nonetheless, his desire to keep on studying pushed him towards finding alternatives in the adult education system. His first attempt to enroll was unsuccessful as he didn't manage to fill out the papers in due course for that night school in Pacheco. One year later, he found out about the popular high school and without wondering too much about it, he started his third and final year of senior high school.

"When I got there, at no point in time was there any discussion, like at the other places where when you get in they make you feel uncomfortable. At all times they made me feel comfortable. In other words, everyone was very happy that I was starting, as if we were all one big family, and they talked. For example, if a classmate had skipped two or three days they would ask, 'does anybody know what happened with so and so?' 'No, we don't know', 'well, then I'll try and drop by his house

⁴⁵ Translator's Note: A student in the Argentine high school system loses regularity when s/he has exceeded the maximum number of authorized absences during a year. In that case, the pupil can no longer go to classes but may take all the examinations at the end of the year.

to see why he's not coming'. Let's say they were really concerned and I loved it. From that moment on, I really loved the place."

The ability to enroll after the deadline and the caring attitude of the institution's staff when classmates were absent constituted big differences when compared to his previous experiences. Not only did the school as an institution acknowledge the specifics of the pupils, in this particular case looking at why they were absent and assessing different ways of ensuring they stayed in school, but it also made Gastón feel welcome within the community.

"They respect your opinions very much, they don't just let you say something and let it hang in the air, no, you say something and then they add 'well, he said this, and we're going to analyze it, to see what it is that he said', as if we all come here to learn from the others. The teacher comes and teaches me what I don't know but during that same session I can give different points of view just as any other classmate, and he can find out that there is a mistake, so we can learn from each other."

In the middle of that same year, Gastón got a job at a meat processing plant in Pacheco. Labor conditions were good, as for the first time in his life he was paying into his pension fund and a health plan. However, the time schedule overlapped with his high school classes and this led to his first and lengthy absence periods. After one month on the job, and for reasons relating to the company itself, they decided to suspend large numbers of employees, including Gastón. In this context, and seeing the unique experience afforded by high school, he decided to go back to school the following day and ask to be readmitted.

"And I said to myself: 'I'm going to see if they allow me to come back or otherwise I'll sit for all the exams at the end of the year'. That's what I came to say and first talked to a teacher who said 'everything is OK but we have to talk about it with all the classmates in a gathering and see what they decide, in other words, we all have to decide.'"

As is typical in an institutional model that tries to make the most stringent aspects of traditional formatted schools more flexible, in the popular high schools the decision-making level becomes an educational tool based on the participation of students and teachers in building the standards. As such, it is acknowledged that the assemblies or gatherings are the space where internal conflicts are solved and certain decisions are made. There is an initial type of gathering taking place inside the class, where the problems affecting only that class are dealt with. However, what may have started as an internal conflict in one classroom may end up becoming a general issue within the school. In that case, the discussion spreads to all participants, teachers and pupils of every level alike, giving rise to the general assembly. That assembly becomes a space in school where participatory democracy is the basis from which debating and decision-making occurs. In the assemblies, the thinking process is collective and dialog takes place on an equal footing, but the decision is individual, as once the debate is over everybody casts his or her own vote.

"Everybody was present at the assembly and I told them that I had just lost the job that had led me to drop out of school. Everybody said it was fine, in other words I told them I wanted to come back, and that I wanted to know what they thought about it. Right? And we all took the floor in turns and everybody said it was fine."

The group of teachers and students accepted Gastón's request, justifying their positive vote on the reasons he had explained himself regarding the days he was absent. For the first time, structural factors were taken into consideration in the framework of the educational pathway. For the first time, the number of absences strengthened his family's image of him.

4.3. The revenge logic: Santiago's case

"It kind of motivates you, you say 'oooooh, I finished third year of senior high school, at the age of 28 I completed high school! It makes you want more; it feeds your self-esteem, as if your ego got boosted, as if you had surpassed yourself."

The way in which Santiago faced the adverse conditions that marked his twenty-eight years allows us to understand the solitude of his pathway, as well as the challenges he managed to overcome in each of the steps. As could be expected, his educational pathway was no stranger his problems, quite the contrary: it has been conditioned by economic determinism and a family environment that could not assist him in facing the ups and downs of his school pathway. However, the possibility of getting his high school diploma was for him a typical way of overcoming a problem, as the completion of high school becomes a significant personal quest.

Born in Uruguay, Santiago was 5 years old when his mother made the decision to try her luck in Argentina. That is how, as soon as they arrived in Buenos Aires, they settled in the town of Tigre, where his mother remarried. The following year, Santiago started his educational pathway. Without repeating any of the primary school grades, in 1992 he managed to finish his basic education, when he was 12. Living in the town of Pacheco, the following year he decided to begin high school in a nearby school. However, the lack of interest that Santiago seemed to show for his studies, added to the increased conflict level because of his poor relationship with his stepfather, led him to drop out of school for the first time. Although a year later he managed to be re-enrolled in the same institution, again his educational path was hampered by an event that seems to have assumed great importance in his life.

"One day, while playing with a gun, I wanted to kill myself. I left school, I had many problems at home and besides that I was dating a so-called girlfriend but she said a few things I didn't want to hear about, that she was seeing someone else, or something like that. So, between the problems at home and those with her, my head was bursting, I didn't know what to do and one of the bad things about me is that if I have a problem I keep it to myself, I don't talk it over with anybody. Well, that day I burst inside, I went home and, well, I started playing Russian roulette and a shot was fired."

Indeed, the suicide attempt, or "accident" as Santiago usually calls it, seems to have had an impact on the way he saw himself. In other words, from then onwards Santiago was able to start valuing personal attributes which had not been acknowledged by him until then and, in turn, to voice new expectations with the need to build a new pathway. Since then, the decision-making process became a tool that enabled him to face reality; a resource that gave him strength and allowed him to picture himself as the owner of his own destiny.

"You see, today I partially regret it and partially don't. Because if you want to commit suicide, it is like losing something in order to value other things, that is, before I didn't use to value myself, whereas today I value very much what I do because, let's put it this way, it happened for a reason".

The following year, Santiago decided to make a trip to Uruguay to reunite with his father after ten years without having had any news from him. As he saw he wasn't welcome, poorly treated by his father, he quickly moved to his Uruguayan grandmother's house before returning to Buenos Aires to resume studying. When he was 18 he managed to finish the first year of high school in Pacheco. However, economic needs forced him out of school again. From there onwards his life was spent between Buenos Aires and his grandmother's home in Paysandú. For Santiago, Uruguay became a haven where he would seek new opportunities when faced with the hardships of his day-to-day life in Argentina. That is why his work path triggered his migratory movements until the year 2007, when Santiago made the decision to finish his high school studies in the province of Buenos Aires.

"I decided to enroll in high school thanks to the girlfriend of a friend of mine who used to come here. While talking to her I said 'I want to study' and she convinced me to keep on studying in the popular high school. I came here on March 12 of last year, they said 'yes, there is a vacancy', so I

went to the other school, asked for the transfer note, made a photocopy and enrolled, and that afternoon, on the very same day, I started studying again”.

Popular high school represents for Santiago a world of ‘opportunities’. On the one hand, the time schedule allows him to keep on working as an assistant nurse in an old people’s home and also to study at home and carry out some household chores. It is worth mentioning that for the past few years Santiago’s salary has represented a high percentage of that home’s total income. Besides, the flexibility proposed by the popular high school’s institutional model regarding absences encouraged him in his desire to complete high school.

“I think anyone who drops out and stays out of school does so because he or she wants it that way. It is not because the school or the teachers prevent you from keeping on. A lot of opportunities are granted here to those who skip school for work, health or any other reasons, you know? Those who skip school because they have a valid reason are given an opportunity to carry out a practical task, you see, or the teachers help them to try to catch up because they know why they skipped school.”

Likewise, the curriculum proposed by popular high schools and the dialogic link that arises between the teacher and the students seems to have had a very specific impact on Santiago’s educational pathway. To begin with, both aspects lead to a special atmosphere inside the classroom (Marhuenda, Navas & Pinazo, 2004) which, in his case, triggered a greater commitment in the teaching-learning process. In turn, the way of grasping, of taking ownership of knowledge became for him a resource, both practical and thoughtful, that has granted him the possibility of taking action when faced with the hardships of daily life.

The design of the curricula in popular high schools has been based on the official structure, without which there would be no legal framework to grant certificates. It comprises a collection of subjects organized by discipline and by area, needed for the development of a critical knowledge of reality and work, and takes into account the life experience of the students, to create a place where they anchor their will to build their own knowledge base. As such, new topics related to the life of the neighborhood are added to the basic common contents of Federal education, and there are additional programs linking the standard curriculum with new, related disciplines. What’s interesting about the areas is the possibility of analyzing a given problem from different perspectives suggested by each discipline. From that standpoint, knowledge is not fragmented in a variety of perspectives, which very often prevent their understanding but it takes on board a holistic approach and thus takes better ownership of that particular knowledge.

“And the way they teach is like going forward, it’s as if a subject matter covers more areas and goes deeper into the concrete aspect of it, towards reality, not focusing on books but specifically on what you are living in your day-to-day life. For example, I love the subject ‘Human Resources’ because they teach you how the rights of people are oriented, how everybody gets organized in their lives, both in their work life and in their day-to-day life, in other words it is as if they teach you to make demands, well not really to make demands, but to pose a certain number of questions”.

In this vein, the teachings of the high schools aim at going beyond common sense to offer various theoretical frameworks that are linked with the experience of the students themselves. The teacher becomes a key figure in the mediation between knowledge and the pupils, as he or she poses problems and guides analysis by introducing a number of concepts and theories that are necessary to gain a critical knowledge of reality (Brusilovsky, 2006). However, for high schools this should not bring about an unequal power relationship between teachers and students as intellectual autonomy must be the result the learning process. As such, the need to put at the disposal of students different theoretical interpretations comes about. From these, they will be in a position to establish relationships and comparisons. The dialogic link, based on the respect and acceptance of the ideas of the others, becomes a key aspect of the teacher-pupil relationship. From this perspective, the teacher is no longer the cause of learning but is considered successful when providing a meaning to learning, stimulating among the students a commitment towards knowledge and the way it is brought into their minds. The contents are not only transmitted through the curriculum, but also through the relationship that arises between the teacher and

the students. In this vein, if a good curriculum is one that makes sure that the standards are worthwhile (Stenhouse, 1997), the teacher's task is to generate a classroom atmosphere based on a wider degree of identification between the standards of the youth and adults participating and those of the teachers. The construction of this set of shared values between the players is a foundation on which knowledge may be transmitted.

"Another thing is the teachers. Did you realize they have a different way of teaching than the other ones? In other words, they combine both things, the practical and theoretical aspects, but it is as if they taught more of the practical ones than the theoretical ones. For example, a subject I really like, 'social training', teaches you how to react when faced with different types of problems. When we were studying the subject of family violence, we saw that violence is not only the blows but sometimes there is psychological violence, you see, basically verbal violence, that's the one that hurts the most sometimes. It is as though it dawns more on you, as if from your own being you manage to rationalize the situation. You manage the private situations, and that is good".

In the framework of the *revenge logic*, one may acknowledge that high school brings about tools which, to a certain extent, provide strength to Santiago's "being", to what he himself represents. On the one hand, the actual possibilities of this institutional and pedagogical model, regarding the securing of a high school degree, are the fostering of his expectations to better himself when facing economic and social determinisms. On the other hand, the practical and thoughtful nature of learning but, above all, the way in which knowledge is brought about, becomes a useful tool that will help him to face complex situations in his day-to-day life.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to remember that the key role of subjective factors in the analysis of the educational pathways of the youth does not deny the presence of structural conditioning factors in the composition of each of the pathways, but takes them on board. Although the appraisal, motivations and expectations are partially determined by a certain reality, i.e., they are built into the specific social and economic context of each young person, the intention was to underscore those moments in which the decision-making process tried to place itself beyond the objective factors. From this standpoint, the preparation of these *logics* led us to acknowledge the "most subjective" aspects underpinning the decision-making levels, on the one hand, and to examine their impact on the way action is prepared when faced with a specific environment, on the other.

In this context, the analysis awarded us the possibility to acknowledge that although Hernán's wish to "become a worker" was the result of a family history anchored in the industrial world, the decisions he made throughout his educational pathway aimed at achieving this goal. As such, (a) the time he spent in the technical school, motivated by the certainty that such a training would provide him with a successful acceptance in the industrial world, (b) the continuous search for opportunities so that his forced entry into the labor market would set in motion his worker's "role" and (c) his choice of going back to school so that high school would improve his work conditions for him are all decision-making processes looking for a position vis-à-vis the adverse conditions of Hernán's reality. For his part, and as suggested above, in the case of Gastón, the uprooting and the worsening of the family's economic conditions were responsible for the fragmentation of his school pathway. However, the analysis led us to acknowledge that the desire to be valued within the family environment triggered a series of decisions which all contributed to have him continue his studies and guaranteed his place, his "being" inside the family. In this framework, the efforts to make sure that the changes of schools, brought about by each and every move of the family, would not change his school performance; his willingness to overcome the fears of a learning "failure" and, therefore, a failure inside his own family; and the quest for alternative institutional models that would allow him, in spite of the adversities of his environment, to complete high school, are key moments which lead us to understand how the

affective logic underpins the inner part of his decisions. Finally, Santiago's wish to overcome economic and social determining factors is at the root of the decisions he made in the framework of his educational pathway. From this perspective, the self-confidence he needed to face on his own the economic and family challenges, the certainty that the effort and the bravery would bring about better results and, particularly, the conviction that the completion of high school is a goal that is not too far-away and accessible, all are personal quests that strengthen him and enable him to be positioned in the wake of complex situations of his day-to-day life.

It is finally worth underscoring the impact that the institutional and pedagogical model, specific to the popular high schools, has had in the educational pathways of the youth who have gone through those schools. As seen from the previous analysis, the educational proposal of that high school had an impact on each of the educational pathways studied. On the one hand, one may acknowledge that the popular high school has fulfilled the initial expectations of the youth by keeping them in school and providing them with a high school diploma, but in turn, the choice of that kind of educational option seems to have had a different meaning in each of these cases. As pointed out, for Hernán there is a link between going to school and building his own space of belonging, which was granted to him thanks to the school itself. Likewise, the teaching-learning model provided him with new tools, ways of thinking, which in turn allowed him to achieve the goal of improving his condition in the present job. For Gastón, the flexibility of the institutional model seems not only to have taken on board the structural factors that lay at the foundation of his prolonged absenteeism, but also to have offered him a new working plan adapted to his current possibilities. So, staying in school led to the reinforcement of his ("affective") presence inside his own family circle. In the case of Santiago, the pedagogical proposal catered for his completion of the cycle and, particularly, provided him with a theoretical and practical knowledge which in turn allowed him to grasp his own day-to-day reality. From this perspective, it may be acknowledged that the popular high school consolidated *his revenge* by feeding back to him an image of improvement and the possibility of projecting a future for himself with new opportunities.

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Insertion sequences: an alternative for analyzing the labor pathways of the youth

By María Eugenia Longo

1. Introduction

The political, economic, social and cultural pace of Argentina, marked among other things by contingency, the short term, speed, and urgency (Santiso, 2002; Sarlo, 2003), calls for a quick insertion of the young into the employment world in spite of the informal and precarious nature of such an employment world and the simultaneous nature of study and work during and after high school (Salvia & Tuñón, 2003), showing a juvenile world strongly marked by active life. According to a study carried out in 2009 on urban teenagers aged between 13 and 17 in Argentina (Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina, 2009), only 64% study, while 20% are active on the labor market (out of which 6% study and work, 3% study and look for a job, 11% work only) and 6% neither study nor look for a job. This shows the early active life insertion trends, with a dual pathway 'work + study' and dropping out of training in some cases, which tends to become more widespread as we move down the social and economic scale of the population concerned. Likewise, a recent study (Pérez 2008, 2009) on the labor transition of young Argentines aged between 15 and 24 shows that, when compared to adults, the transition of the new generations towards employment is marked by a greater likelihood of being unemployed but a shorter unemployment period, with more frequent transitions from unemployment to inactivity than from unemployment to employment, among other characteristics.

These insertion trends occur in the framework of a unique historical context that extends beyond Argentina. The change in employment standards moving towards a more flexible, unstable and precarious model (Castel & Haroche, 2001; Dubar, 2002; Salvia & Tuñón, 2003; Pérez, 2008) goes hand in hand with a weakening of the social institutions which used to be the hallmark of socialization (family, school, employment and trade union) (Dubet, 2002) and a transformation of social and biographical temporality marked by uncertainty and the need to turn the experience into a present tense issue (Hartog, 2003; Laidi, 2000). All these phenomena ultimately reinforce the de-standardization of youth transitions.

The linear nature of this questioning of the pathways leads us to wonder not only in which transitions this happens but also what the sociological tools are for observing them and the political mechanisms for regulating them. If the transitions of the young change, then the scientific observation and the political action must also evolve.

And yet, regarding research, there are three risks which seem to prevent us from understanding the specific complexity of this context. The first risk is the oversimplification of factors, i.e., the trend towards overemphasizing certain factors while leaving others without being analyzed. For example, the fact of focusing only on the insertion practices without considering their symbolic representations, or vice-versa. The second risk is that of reducing a time line to a single time dot, i.e. ultimately focalizing on the starting point of a pathway *or* on its arrival point. The third risk is that of ideological appraisal, i.e., the valuation of a pathway stemming only from the employment standard of the salaried people, which tends to judge the situation by virtue of stabilization, inclusion, exclusion, success or failure, leaving the remaining criteria aside. However, pathways are processes which a) put in play different types and levels of factors; b) develop over time, and hence the factors involved are subject to change or to evolution or to the arrival of new possibilities; c) may be assessed using multiple criteria according to the ones at stake (criteria of salaried employment, appraisal of the young people themselves or of their parents, the criteria of youth specialists or those of the programs for the young, etc.)

Such a definition of the pathways and an attempt to avoid such risks lead us to identify three key ideas for this research. The first one is that in a context of deinstitutionalization in which all individuals must construct the bases of their own identity because they are not given one as such, the social representations, the symbolic relations and other subjective factors become more relevant, thus shifting the interest towards the players, their commitment, their arguments, and the construction of the reality surrounding them. The second idea is that the analysis of such a multiplicity of factors may be carried out considering the time and its impact, i.e., carrying out a process analysis. The labor transitions take their time and the analysis of the initial condition or that of the end of the insertion are not enough to understand the social and labor condition of individuals. One has to go back to the past and observe the insertion process. Finally, the third idea of this paper is that as those factors explaining the situation become more and more complex and a given process becomes more provisional, one must implement analytical and methodological tools that can lead to discerning the factors and the time periods. Such an interweaving must take place without reducing the factors to a preset list of variables or the time period to a single time dot. Both reductions would oversimplify such complex social processes.

This chapter will focus on this very last idea. We will deal with the need to move away from a purely declarative discourse about complexity by proposing, at the same time, tools that are useful to deal with it. The goal is to empirically analyze the configurations of factors that build the differential insertion pathways inside a qualitative longitudinal panel of young Argentine women and men. The empirical data gathered for this chapter come from research whose main goal was to identify differentiated processes of transition of the young towards adult life, with a particular emphasis on time lines and labor insertion.

The data, i.e., the practices and discourses of 85 young people, come from two series of interviews: the first one in 2006, when participants were between and 16 and 18 years old and were finishing their training (with or without a degree) and the second one, two years later, in 2008. The young people in this panel⁴⁶ may be distinguished from each other because they have undergone different types of training containing different notions of labor, giving rise to a variety of institutional proposals. The training options are: senior high school (for the vast majority of those going to high school in Argentina), technical high school (formerly industrial high school) and the vocational training courses (henceforth called VT) by and large offered to young people who drop out of school and who live in poor neighborhoods.⁴⁷ These types of training may bring about structural differences between social groups.

A comparison of the young people inside the panel group shows that there are multiple ways of being integrated into the labor world. These differences exist because the pathways encompass different factors, but also because the young use and put in motion similar factors in different ways. Likewise, such linkages evolve over time. In the framework of a diversification of pathways, it is nevertheless possible to find configurations that are typical of resources, boundaries, individual representations and labor insertion practices.

⁴⁶ The 85 young people were selected on the basis of 400 cases coming from 9 training institutions in the northern suburbs of the city of Buenos Aires.

⁴⁷ The senior high school level was called "secundario polimodal" in 2007, but the name is no longer used. It is the one most frequently followed by the young (84% of young Argentines going to high school) and pupils go to school in the morning or the afternoon only. The technical high school was called high school for "production of goods and services" while the "polimodal" was in force, and covers technical majors in electromechanics, electronics, house construction and food processing. 16% of the high school or polimodal students go these schools. This training path means up to 9 hours per day of schooling and intensive practical training inside the school or in productive organizations. The vocational training (VT) means short courses of between one and two years leading to an immediate search for employment. These are geared towards computing, electricity, carpentry, welding, cooking, and textiles and given accreditation by the national educational service. Among the options provided by public vocational training centers we find some that are organized by civil society institutions, like NGOs or churches, generally located in poor neighborhoods and in low economic resource areas.

Such configurations will be analyzed under the term “insertion sequences”, a notion explained in previous papers (Bidart & Longo, 2007; Longo, 2009; Longo, Méndez & Tchobanian, 2010; Longo, 2010)

Sequences are temporary time slots of the insertion pathways. If we use a metaphor, the sequence is one link of a chain in a *continuum* of links making up the pathway. This notion allows us to stop, sit back, and zoom in on the pathway at a specific moment in order to discover and observe the elements that set such a pathway in motion.

Sequences combine two aspects: linkages of factors, and a succession or movement. In other words, order and time specify the sequence. Time is present precisely due to the fact that various individual and social factors exert an influence consecutively throughout a pathway. And the order exists, not as a structured and fixed list of variables, but as a configuration of factors continuously evolving and yet relatively stable, so that we may indeed identify such a configuration.

The term “sequence” provides a theoretical and empirical “density” to the explanation of the pathway, not only because it replaces the idea of a pre-set list of classical variables with the idea of factor configuration, but also because it avoids “stopping the time” or reducing the time to a dot (Moment 1, Moment 2, etc.) and conversely considers it as a wider segment which is moving and which may be operationalized.

We will start by specifying the indicators that have been used to build the sequences. We will then introduce the labor insertion sequences of young men and women in Argentina, i.e., the configuration of factors that lead them to take their first steps in the world of work. We will then describe the social distribution of these sequences. Finally, we will make some comments on the use of this notion, which is both theoretical and practical.

2. The sequences of labor insertion

When observing the insertion pathways of the young, one idea stands out: not all of them make headway or confront the labor market in the same manner. Besides, they do not all give the same importance to work, nor do they value in the same manner their degrees, experiences, contacts or expectations. In other words, the youth follow different labor insertion patterns, and to attempt to explain them only on the basis of gender, prior experience, family environment or explicit projects they have in mind is not enough. In the framework of a qualitative and longitudinal analysis, one may integrate those factors with others, to observe their reciprocal influences and the way they evolve.

In this vein, the “insertion sequences” are a useful analytical and methodological tool. In this research, these sequences display three characteristics of labor insertion: on the one hand, the objective insertion pathway, on the other, the existing representations about working life throughout the insertion procedure itself and, finally, the longitudinal aspect or the evolution of insertion, which takes place over time. The empirical indicators representing such characteristics have been selected on the basis of both their relevance and empirical recurrence, and from the vast sociological literature on labor and youth insertion which highlights these indicators as being relevant from a theoretical standpoint.

To begin with, the “objective” indicators that point us to the concrete practices of labor insertion pathways are the following: a) labor experience during high school or vocational training in permanent jobs, part time employment, petty jobs or in internships during high school; b) the activity status of the young during the two years following the end of their training period: activity or inactivity?; and c) the type of labor insertion that occurs after the training period, marked by a high turnover between unstable part-time jobs, then a stable permanent job, and then the oscillation between employment and inactivity, or the search for a job.

Second, the “subjective” indicators highlighting the symbolic representation of labor life are: a) the relationship with the activity, i.e., the place occupied by the job in one’s life, where different notions may be identified: key, non-key, tendency, lack of interest, aversion or disinclination towards the activity; b) the link with the job, i.e., the reasons for getting a job which vary between money, autonomy, personal achievement, and the content of the work; c) the relationship to the job, i.e., the criteria used to assess concrete jobs: salary, time schedule, type of contract, link with training, field of activity, etc.; d) the relationship with the labor world, i.e., the image of the labor world and the representation offered by society of those jobs, which in turn allows to identify different images: demanding, precarious, affording opportunities, short-term solution.

Third, the labor practices and representations analyzed here vary over time, they change as a function of experience or get reinforced over time, and we may check that by looking at longitudinal data⁴⁸. The description of the evolution of factors and their linkages are important and necessary. The evolution we refer to is not, however, unequivocal. It may reinforce linearity, continuity or, conversely, prepare radical changes or even display them. Thus, the type of evolution we will point out in each sequence is indicative of an orientation: either a visible change or a continuity⁴⁹ during the period under consideration (the first two years of insertion after training) of the situation as described above. The longitudinal data are particularly useful for making this distinction because of the successive and deferred formulation (two series of interviews, two years apart): the same questions posed to the same individuals allows for a clear reading of the change and the transformation when one compares practices and representations in different moments.

Let us now list the labor insertion sequences of young Argentines as we saw them in this study. They are described by listing the indicators mentioned before (objective insertion characteristics, symbolical representations and type of evolution)⁵⁰. The 9 following sequences might in turn be grouped in wider sets according to the type of insertion they refer to. Thus, some sequences show an emergence (sequences 1 and 2), a consolidation (sequences 3, 4 and 5), or a fragmentation (sequences 6 and 7), of insertion, while others describe insertion by its absence because the young people talk about work without having had any work experience (sequences 8 and 9).

2.1 Sequence of activity discovery

“I prioritize my studies: I prefer to finish my studies first and then to work” (2006) “I work because I like it, I like it, I think it is an environment to get in touch with different people over and beyond the money itself, which of course comes in handy” “right now I can’t imagine living without working because once you have started working...” (2008) (Sebastian, private senior high school, student at law school, employee in a telephone company).

This sequence is objectively marked by the lack of labor experience during high school and by insertion and stabilization coming afterwards in permanent, full-time jobs (getting close to a structured labor environment, on-the-spot learning, a specific professional environment). Subjectively, the sequence represents the situation of those young who are not *a priori* interested in working and who later discover the labor activity, thus modifying their relationship to work: from lack of interest, aversion and rejection they move to being interested in the job.

⁴⁸ The interviews carried out at different times with the same individuals have the advantage of showing both the objective and subjective changes over and beyond the interpretation made by the interviewed person him- or herself. In this case we will compare the first and second series of interviews with the same group of young people, henceforth S1 (first series carried out in 2006) and S2 (second series carried out in 2008).

⁴⁹ In this case, continuity doesn’t mean lack of change but an evolution following the same direction as before.

⁵⁰ The title of a sequence points mainly to the factor that has been used to distinguish it from the others, highlighting in some cases the subjective nature, in others the objective nature, but always indicating the evolution or orientation followed in this segment of the pathway.

This does not mean, however, that their labor activity becomes a key factor in their lives. Actually, the reasons for working are essentially instrumental, once they have experienced the material and symbolic benefits they get from working. These young are betting on a later insertion linked to university training. The present time jobs are considered provisional, they represent “good opportunities” which generate “experience” while waiting to actually be able to exercise their future professions. Likewise, these young value and prioritize the criteria behind a typically salaried job (formality, durability, evolution, etc.). The vision of the world of work is varied and evolves with every case (demanding, affording opportunities, improving, worsening, etc.). It is therefore a sequence of transformation of practices and representations.

2.2 Sequence of trying out the activity with no time pressure or heavy demands

“you have two options: either you start working and make some money in any activity or you start some kind of training activity that you like and you earn less money” (2006) “I no longer work because of my studies, but because I’m good at my job, I work an hour and a half per day, I have lot of spare time and I earn enough for that hour and a half” (2008) (Federico, public senior high school, student in computer sciences, working as a security agent in a cosmetics factory).

It is a sequence objectively marked by the lack of labor experience during high school and a later insertion into a wide variety of petty jobs and part-time jobs, unstable and with few working hours. Because of the type of employment, its voluntary nature, we are talking about “trying out”, a restricted taster of the world of work. Insertion thus takes place at a moderate pace, with no heavy demands. Indeed, although the image of a typical salaried job does exist as a sort of gold standard, nowadays the criteria for accepting or rejecting a job offer are the schedule, the job description and the link between employment and study. The wage does not seem to be a selection criterion. Subjectively, experience and economic autonomy are the reasons for accepting a job. There is a trend towards becoming active, but it is not key, because of the importance these young people give to studies after high school, which are considered as vocational. The difference between this and the previous sequence is objective and subjective. In this one, not only are youths inserted in a stable manner, also alternating between employment and inactivity periods, but they have also stressed that they are interested in working, even when the activity does not play a major role in their lives.

2.3. Sequence of reinforcement of the key aspect of work in life

“... for me, work and freedom have always been synonymous” “...work is indispensable. For me a person cannot live without feeling useful.” (2006)

“Work is health [...] To know that you get up and you have a goal that day” (2008)

(Santiago, private technician, marketing student. Employee in a multinational oil company.)

The main characteristic of this sequence is that after intense labor activity in permanent and formal jobs, it reinforces the key nature of labor in his life. It is a sequence of objective and subjective continuity (under the shape of reinforcement) of the workplace. Objectively, this sequence regroups those young who have a lengthy work experience, essentially in permanent type jobs during their high school and professional lives. Such an experience continues afterwards and promotes an objective insertion into a multiplicity of jobs, which in most cases finishes with stabilization in formal employment and a full-time job. This experience highlights the fact that for these young people their job is of the essence, when compared to other aspects of life, and that such a central activity in turn reinforces the activity itself. Subjectively, the reasons for working are instrumental. Although they are present and linked to economic

autonomy, they keep a space for personal achievement, usefulness, acknowledgement, psychological equilibrium, and self-esteem. The axis of this sequence is to be found in the relation to the job and the activity (and less in the employment and the labor world). Young people in this sequence feel they have opportunities and they consider that by being active they will know how to make good use of them. They have some defined projects, but also a large flexibility to adapt to circumstances.

2.4. Sequence for naturalizing the activity

"I have younger brothers and I would like to give them a good example (...), to show them that one has to work and make one's own money" (2006) "in fact, we're born, we have to study, and then we have to work and work until the day we retire, that is the law of life" (2008). Marcelo, technician graduated from a public school, high school unfinished, salesman in a security and hygiene company)

"I take working as a natural thing" "I probably got used to it" (2006) "working in order to keep on living, I work and I feel good" "I love to work, I've been working since I was 12" (2008). Julio, electrical technician, contractor in a floor laying company)

There are no radical changes in this sequence, rather a continuous evolution towards installation and staying in the activity. It is objectively marked by a vast labor experience in permanent jobs (typical of the poorest young kids)⁵¹, although also petty jobs and internships (typical of those young kids who have finished high school). This experience continues then after high school or vocational training school, reaching stabilization. The permanent activity is often stimulated by the parents for unforeseen reasons (like precocious parenthood), because of the lack of resources of the family (unemployment, divorce or death of one of the parents) and also because of a very specific appraisal of certain social and cultural standards regarding labor ("this is the law of life", "one must work").

Subjectively, there is a central aspect of work in life, a naturalization, experienced as a 'habit'. And just like any other habit, it is there for its owner not to have to question it over and over again, but to reproduce it and integrate it to his/her daily practices. This is what distinguishes it from the previous sequence of "reinforcement of the key aspect of work". In this last case, the labor activity is key, not so much by virtue of a social mandate but because of the link there is between work and personal achievement. This does not mean that in the new naturalization sequence the work is not linked to the achievement itself, to one's projects or to gain experience. However, these last reasons are not the main ones for getting a job and at any rate the relationship with the job is not experienced that way. Little by little, the reasons for working become less important because the subject doesn't even think about not being active anymore. The model of salaried employment is a desire and defined as the ideal job. Once again, a social norm, without having a majority position, is imposed and defines the labor practice of these young people. Regarding the labor world, the young define it as a world of labor opportunities that one must go out and look for, even though they also criticize their precariousness.

The middle and low social origin of these young people and their transit through training institutions whose main goal is to lead them to labor insertion, while insisting less on the continuation of studies after high school (the standard cycle of technical high schools and the name indeed used by vocational training is self-defeating), combine to create this social position vis-à-vis the job.

⁵¹ Indeed, generally speaking, most of the labor experience of the poorest young is in petty jobs. In this group we find precisely those young people belonging to that sector who have carried out permanent and typical jobs, those who have managed to have a labor pathway marked by better conditions than those generally belonging to that segment.

2.5. Sequence of professionalization on the job

"Getting a job to show that what you studied was really worth it" (2006) "I'm not very well paid, but I like it. Little by little I start learning, because it is a specialty chosen by many" (2008) (Rocío, public technical high school, studying architecture, employed in an architectural bureau)

The main objective characteristic of this sequence is the lack of labor experience during training, and later insertion and stabilization in a job linked not only to the high school training period but also to the post high school training. The change at the insertion practice level, the conversions between employment and skills, has an impact at a subjective level, reinforcing the pathway chosen. Subjectively, the link between specialized stable employment and a specific knowledge acquired during the training phase is the main reason for these young people to get a job. The tendency towards a labor activity does exist; it is upheld and even reinforced by the conversions between employment and training. The priority of these young is to develop technical and labor skills. In this sequence, the job has a purpose to the extent that it is a learning source or a place to apply the technical knowledge acquired. This appraisal criterion of the job does not exclude others: the typical salaried employment model is still valid as an ideal job if it is linked to the task and the employment conditions that come along. The image of the labor world is typified by the opportunities and the precariousness that come in cycles, even though they haven't really experienced the latter. These young have a better definition of the skills created with their training, which they carry to the labor world after school. Prior studies (Jacinto & Gallart, 1997; Gallart, 2006; Jacinto & Dursi, 2009) have insisted repeatedly on the fact that the technical skills learnt – compared to other purposes that may be provided by the labor practice, like social-labor skills or personal or relational skills – are particularly appraised by the graduates from technical schools.

2.6. Sequence of dematerializing⁵² the work

"I worked because I wanted the money, that's all" (2006) "I work because I'm a big girl now and also because it's good for me" (2008) (Romina, private senior high school, teacher training studies, employed as a coach in a poor kids' home)

"Working? The main idea is to get the money you need for everything" (2006) "Working gave me internal growth, it related me to other people (2008)" (José, public senior high school, studying music recording and production, employed in a commercial photo studio).

This sequence is objectively marked by a vast labor experience in part-time or petty jobs during or after high school and by insertion in a multiplicity of jobs later on, also part-time or petty jobs (generally informal in nature). Subjectively, the tendency of these young to work is very marked. However, the activity in itself is not key to their lives. This sequence shows a change in the configuration of factors which mainly takes place at the level of the representations (although these representations do have consequences and they are the result of concrete labor practices). In this sequence the reasons for working change after the young people have completed high school. They move from an instrumental vision to one linked to their personal achievement, from working for the money to working for the experience or because of the link between job and study or to become more autonomous. For these youngsters the quality of the employment is not so important, at least in the sense of looking for a job that would be adapted to the standard of any salaried job. They are interested in the time schedule, the contents and the money they can get from the job. In this sequence, the image of the labor world is precarious even when there are insertion possibilities (and the pathways are the evidence of that), they are

⁵² Translator's Note: we have used "dematerializing" to indicate that the young who used to work "for the money" are now interested in the job contents and their own personal achievement.

critical of the employment system, which means low wages, informal workers, many hours on the job, a compulsory degree and, above all, a lot of experience.

These are also young people who are thinking about university studies or tertiary education linked to social sciences, educational or artistic activities. Besides, they are interested in many activities which are not directly linked to their training or their jobs (artistic activities and hobbies, participating in groups going to a mission, or in associations, etc.). These are young people from various social and educational origins who nevertheless have many social resources and contacts and are convinced about their future projects in different realms of life.

2.7. Sequence of a grueling experience of the labor world: disenchantment

"It was good to have obtained a degree in being a technician, so I can get into companies" (2006) *"you don't know how hard it is to get a job"* *"now that I have the degree they're going to call me from everywhere? That's a lie. I never worked thanks to my diploma"* (2008) (Felix: public high school technician, machine operator)

"You get a job pretty quick" *"working is having a new experience"* (2006) *"nowadays it's really hard to get a job"* *"working is being in a bad mood, I never liked to work"* (2008) (Cecilia: unfinished public senior high school, studying catering, employed in an over-the-phone sales agency)

This sequence merges, in objective terms, a vast labor experience having acquired before and after training and, in subjective terms, a symbolic evolution which is manifested at the end of the period by a deep aversion to the activity. The relationship to the activity changes: from being key to not being key in life. The youth who find themselves in this position gradually lose pleasure in working. The tremendous contradiction between the activity levels and the aversion or disenchantment can be explained by the hyper activity and, mainly, by the disappointment seen in a demanding and precarious labor world.

This sequence marks a deep change in the representations of the activity, the work, the employment and the labor world. It is precisely the lack of change or the fact of remaining in a precarious job that generates an evolution of these representations. The job becomes an instrument; the youths' reasons for working are now linked to autonomy and become instrumental. The demands regarding employment become more acute: they move from being interested in the money to setting the typical salaried employment itself as a goal. These are young who over and over again believe they have no control over their own futures. They generally belong to poor segments of society and come from public high schools and vocational training centers without having completed their degrees in all cases.

2.8 Sequence of resistance to insertion

"I don't want to work, (but) I have to work" *"if I got paid for not working..."* (2006) *"I don't want to work; I don't want anybody telling me what to do"* *"why don't they pay me for doing nothing?"* (2008) (Sofia: private high school, studying public relations, not active)

"I would love to live without having to work but I know I have to" (2006) *"fine if you have to work because you have to live, but not that the work becomes your life"* *"I can indeed picture myself working, but not because I'm saying that I want to become useful, it's only for the money"* (2008) (Esther: private high school, marketing student, inactive)

The main characteristic of this sequence is the fact that, without having done any activity, an aversion to work and a resistance to work crop up and, in more general terms, an aversion to

insertion. This is a sequence marked by the material and symbolic continuity of the work not being a key issue in the life of the young. This sequence merges objectively a continuous inactivity before and after high school completion. The continuous inactivity is linked to an aversion to work, it is not only that they don't want to work, but they clearly resist labor insertion at that particular time in their biography. The insertion resistance may be explained by the fact that for the moment the only reason to work would be instrumental in nature. The inactivity may also explain the ideal vision they have about salaried work, a job they will seek later on, linked to their own training and the condemnatory vision they have of the present labor world and of the jobs they may find in it. A demanding and precarious labor world offering alienating jobs that somehow legitimates their resistance to insertion. However, inactivity does not mean passivity, because these youngsters do have university training projects or vocational projects that are well defined and to which they commit a good deal of their time. These are generally speaking young kids from the private high school system.

2.9. Sequence of postponement of insertion

"Maybe I'd like to have other priorities than working, but nowadays it's important to be socially inserted" (2006) "I'm a big boy, I could be working. At home, however, they still prefer that I study instead of working" "in the future I won't be able not to work (...) but right now I have other priorities, such as studying (2008) (Martín - Private school - Medical School - inactive)

"If I ever have kids and they need me I have been thinking about not working" "maybe there are people who only think about working, and maybe working is important but there are other things that are more important" (2006) "I'd like to work but when he [her baby] is two years old, or three, when he can go to kindergarten (2008) (Micaela - public technical high school, inactive, mother)

The main characteristic of this sequence is the postponement of work because of other personal projects. It is marked by the objective and subjective continuity of the labor condition during high school: they do not have any experience when they graduate from high school or from a vocational training center and they still do not work two years later, even if there is a tendency towards labor experience. But unlike the previous sequence, in this case there is no resistance, only an insertion postponement to the medium or long run. Subjectively, the relationship between these young people and activity varies: from being key to being natural to not being key and having an interest in working. The reasons for working and the criteria to assess the jobs are dispersed and not uniform within the sequence. The same happens with the image of the labor world which sometimes looks precarious and demanding and in other cases displays opportunities. The young in this sequence go through two types of non-labor conditions: the young who follow lengthy university studies and whose parents put a certain degree of pressure on them in order not to work and the young women who have become mothers during this period. The first case covers young people coming from the middle classes while the second one are young mothers from the middle and low income tiers, with a public technical education or a vocational training. But in the two cases their projects of a personal nature, be it family, maternity or study, are always above labor projects, which are vague, even in the long run.

We propose a summary of the characteristics of the sequences in Table 1, bearing in mind that the 9 sequences as described above are only a few among all the possibilities that may have found their way in other studies and analyses.

Table 1: Characteristics of the labor insertion sequences of young Argentines

Insertion sequences	Type of evolution of the sequence	Objective insertion pathways			Symbolic representations			
		Status of the activity between S1 and S2	Type of labor insertion in S1	Type of labor insertion in S2	Relationship to the activity	Relationship to the job	Relationship to employment	Relationship to the labor world
Discovery of the activity	change ↻	inactive→ active	no experience	stabilization	From lack of interest (S1) to propension (S2)	salary	salaried employment model	*
Sizing up of the activity	continuity ➔	inactive→ active	no experience	high turnover	not key	experience, autonomy	time schedules, contents	*
Reinforcement of the key aspect of work in life	continuity➔	active	(permanent and part-time jobs)	high turnover + stabilization	key	personal achievement	*	opportunities + precariousness
Naturalizing the activity	continuity➔	active	(permanent jobs)	stabilization	Getting used	social mandate	salaried employment model	opportunities + precariousness
Professionalization on the job	change ↻	inactive→ active	no experience petty jobs	stabilization	propension	link work-training	link employment-qualification	opportunities
Dematerializing the work	change ↻	active	petty jobs	high turnover	propension	from salary (S1) to personal achievement	schedules, contents, salary	precariousness

						(S2)		
Grueling experience of the labor world	change ↻	active	(part-time jobs)	high turnover	From key to (S1) aversion (S2)	from autonomy (S1) to salary (S2)	from salary (S1) to salaried employment model (S2)	from demanding (S1) to precariousness (S2)
Resistance to insertion	continuity ➔	inactive	no experience	no experience	aversion	salary	salaried employment model	demanding - precariousness
Postponement of insertion	continuity➔	inactive	no experience petty jobs	no experience	not key	*	*	*

Source: own data based on those of the young people belonging to this research panel

S1: First series of interviews in 2006

S2: Second series of interviews in 2008

** The asterisk means that this dimension is less relevant in the definition of the sequence or that, because of its dispersion, one cannot identify a single type of relationship.*

3. Is there a social distribution of the labor insertion sequences?

It is always useful and relevant to build tools for analyzing when one conducts research, even more so when the study object is in motion. It thus becomes more diversified or changes as is the case with the insertion pathways. However, and going back to the discussion mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter, how can one avoid getting lost in such a diversification and, hence, discover the social logics underpinning these seemingly unique processes?

A first answer to the question consists in identifying recurrent or typical sequences – which means not giving up on the distinction between pathways. A second answer consists in observing the interaction between the sequences and the pre-existing social logics at the moment of insertion. The educational and labor segmentation, as well as the social and demographic characteristics of individuals, such as their social and educational origin, shows social inequalities inside the sequences. In other words, do all the sequences take place in the same segment of the labor world? Do the young people going through the different sequences all have the same social and educational background?

3.1. The sequences are connected to a segmented labor market

To begin with, the nine sequences as described above do not take place in the same segment of the labor market. One should not forget that the labor representation and practices of the youth take place in a context and as a consequence of that context.

In Argentina, the labor market is marked by the existence of production and labor segments that have different qualities and that are disconnected (Salvia & Tuñón 2003; Miranda, 2006; Pérez, 2008). According to this idea, the population is distributed over these segments as a function of the social characteristics of its origins (social origin, gender, place of residence), thus creating different possibilities, expectations and behaviors. The assumption behind these studies is that the poorest populations, those who already follow an educational pattern of low quality, will be integrated in a “secondary” segment of the labor market, i.e., in informal jobs, non-structured, precarious and unstable, while the population that benefits from a production and consumption system, going through quality educational circuits, will be integrated into the “primary” segment, i.e., formal, structured and located inside the hard core of the production system of the country. The segmentation allows to point at the fact that inequalities do not exist only from a social and occupational hierarchy point of view but also at the level of labor conditions. This is what allows us to understand why young people with the same educational credentials (who graduated from high school, for example) nevertheless do not get the same jobs or have the same labor conditions.

If we go back to this characteristic of the Argentine labor market, we may organize the insertion sequences (those including some kind of experience or labor insertion after studying) as a function of the labor market segment in which they occur (Table 2).

Some sequences are built on a segment of the labor market represented by informality, its provisional nature and the low quality of jobs. Such is the case of the *sizing up of the activity sequence* and *the sequence of dematerializing the work*, mainly marked by temporary, unstable and informal jobs, with the exception of some cases where there is a greater seniority in the employment or the employment is formal, although those are generally cases of part-time jobs and “provisional” jobs from the standpoint of the young. Such is also the case of the *grueling experience of the labor world* that happens in the most marginal sector of the labor market, with flexible schedules and a high number of working hours, in petty jobs or informal and temporary jobs.

Other sequences take place, on the other hand, in the primary sectors of the economy. Such is the case of the *reinforcement sequence of the key aspect of work*, which includes formal and

permanent jobs taking place after training and throughout the previous labor experience. Such is also the case of the *professionalization sequence* and the *activity discovery sequence*, marked by formal jobs, full-time jobs, permanent or fixed, with the exception of the latter when some informal jobs exist usually coinciding with fewer hours in the workplace.

Finally, other sequences take place between these two sectors (primary/secondary; formal/informal) but they are nevertheless marked by a certain job stability, so that the lesser quality of the job is offset by its stability factor⁵³. Such is the case of the *naturalization of the activity sequence*: jobs are sometimes formal, sometimes informal, but the common denominator is that these are full-time jobs where there is a gradual stability in the workplace whereby jobs become permanent both for the young and the employers. Inside the sequence, informal jobs are recurrent among the poorest young and formal jobs are recurrent among those with the highest social origin. The *insertion postponement sequence* can also be found in this intermediary condition. Although a labor insertion as such has not really taken place, petty jobs and contacts with the workplace that the young may have had are: in the primary and formal sectors (mainly stemming from the experience of helping in a family business) for the young people who postpone their labor insertion by virtue of their studies; and in the secondary and informal sectors we find the young girls who postpone their insertion because of motherhood.

The activity sectors are also indicators of the labor market segment where the young are inserted. The business sector (retail and wholesale), catering, personal services, construction and housekeeping services usually higher young people. They are characterized by a high labor turnover and a high degree of informality, contrary to more stable activities such as those linked to the public service (teaching, social services and health services) and financial, real-estate and business activities where the young are under-represented (Pérez, 2008). In each sector the activities establish the purpose of work and the tasks around which the young build their own insertion in a different manner, which is why we deal with them here⁵⁴.

The sequences, which are a material and symbolic expression of labor insertion, are not evenly distributed across sectors. Although there are insertion sequences such as that of the *reinforcement of the key aspect of labor* and that of sizing up the activity, which are distributed across a number of sectors, other sequences are essentially focused on specific sectors. Thus, the *sequence of dematerializing the work* occurs mainly in the services industry (especially in community services, social services, health and teaching) which may partially explain the delinking that marks them. This is “partially” so because this sequence also stumbles on cases in other sectors, specifically in trade. *The discovery of the activity sequence* also essentially takes place in social, community, health or educational services and in trade, predominantly in the latter. *The naturalization of the activity sequence* occurs in the least protected and most informal sectors: trade, construction, industrial activities, although also in community, social and health services, transportation and catering. Therefore it should not come as a surprise that *the professionalization of the job sequence* predominantly takes place in the industrial sector where skills are better defined for skilled workers such as the young people who have finished their technical high school. But the industrial sector also employs young unskilled people, and that is why we very often find therein *the grueling experience of the labor world sequence*.

3.2 Impact of social origin on the insertion sequences

The employment rate and the proportion of formal workers decrease considerably with the income level of households (Pérez, 2008). That is why the labor characteristics of the sequences are an incentive to go back archeologically to the social and educational origin of the young people being analyzed. Their sequences are distinguished from one another because they

⁵³ This situation resembles what Eckert and Mora have called “paradoxical forms of continuity”, i.e., situations where the length of the employment period increases in spite of the precariousness of the job (Eckert y Mora, 2008)

⁵⁴ The resistance to insertion and postponement of insertion sequences have not been mentioned because the young people who follow them then remain inactive during the period under consideration.

concentrate young people from social and educational categories (Table 2). If the social origin has an impact on insertion, this is also due to the fact that such an origin plays a decisive role in access to different types and levels of training (Pérez, 2008). But the origin does not only impact on the access to education but also on the value of the diplomas that these young people have obtained once they have achieved such levels of education: that is why we identified some trends inside the insertion sequences.

Thus, *the sequences of naturalization of the activity and grueling experience of the labor world* are essentially followed by young people with vocational training and public technical high school degrees. These sequences are spearheaded by those young with the least educational and economic resources. The opposite case are the *resistance and postponement of insertion sequences* because of college studies that concentrate those young people from regular high schools, essentially from private institutions. The economic condition of their households gives to these young people the possibility of avoiding the workplace while they are studying. However, when the postponement of the activity is due to motherhood, the *insertion postponement sequence* groups together young women who come from public technical, general or vocational training high schools.

The *sizing up and the discovery of the activity sequences* focus on young people with a regular high school training, be it private or public, although we also find in this category some people coming from the technical high school. However, the *professionalization in the employment sequence* only concentrates on young technical graduates, be it from private or public institutions. As mentioned before, this may be due to the acquisition of more specific skills defined by this type of training. The *sequence of dematerializing the work* bundles highly diversified people from the educational and social origin standpoint. We find therein young people from all kind of training origins, although mainly young people from private and public regular high schools and, in particular the young coming from vocational training who decide not only that they will complete their high school education but also that they will continue with higher education. The *reinforcement of the key aspect of work sequence* groups together young people from regular and technical high schools, only coming from private institutions, i.e., young people who find themselves in the circles with relations and contacts that play the role of a bridge towards labor opportunities of a protected and formal sector.

But the educational origin does not disclose everything about the condition of the young. That is why the sequences may be organized according to the percentages of youth they represent coming from a high or medium working class or a low social origin⁵⁵.

Thus, *the resistance to insertion sequence* and that of *postponement because of higher education studies* or that of the *reinforcement of the key aspects of labor*, and even the *sequence of discovery of the activity* are all marked by their voluntary nature. They occur because of the family and economic resources guaranteed by a high and medium social origin. The opposite case is represented by the *naturalization of the activity sequence*, the *grueling experience of work sequence* and the *postponement of insertion sequence*, in this case because of *maternity reasons*. These sequences are marked by the lack of alternatives, the submissiveness to the lack of opportunities and the inequalities of the labor market. The young people involved in these sequences come by and large from a working class environment.

⁵⁵ The indicator has been built as a function of the social and occupational situation of the head the household (Torrado 1994, 1998) which defines the social position and may be used as a class or social origin indicator of the young (Pérez, 2008). This variable has been used in this research for the social and occupational condition of the head of the household, assimilated in this case to the social and occupational condition of the father in the first series of interviews. The head of the household whose social and occupational profile corresponds to a company director are assimilated to a high social origin. When the occupational level encompasses professionals in a specific function, the owners of small enterprises, technical managers and the like, small self-standing producers, administrative employees and sales people, they are assimilated to a medium social origin; and when the social and occupational level corresponds to autonomous skilled workers, or unskilled or inactive workers, they are assimilated to a working class or low social origin.

The *sequence of dematerializing the work* concentrates a population from a middle-class social origin though also from a working class social origin, in this case with expectations of a social evolution whereby the job bears a closer relationship to the contents and the personal progress. In the *professionalization of the workplace sequence* we find a population coming from working class and middle class origins, who inherit a certain salaried and specialized working class culture. Because of the voluntary nature of the *sizing up of the activity sequence*, the young people found in that sequence usually count on the personal and economic support of their relatives to uphold their decision to get involved in provisional insertions even when they come from a medium or low social origin.

Finally, although we find young men and women in most of the sequences, there is a gender diversification in some of them. Such is the case of *the postponement of the insertion sequence*, when it is due to the birth of a child: there are only women in that particular sequence. Such is also the case of *the resistance to insertion sequence*, which mostly touches upon women. Finally, the *discovery of the activity sequence* also has a vast majority of women in it.

Table 2: Social distribution of the labor insertion sequences of young Argentines

Insertion sequences	Labor market		Fields of activity*											Social origin			Type of training				
	Formal segment	Informal segment	Industry	Construction	Trade	Catering - Hotel industry	Transportation	Financial services	Entrepreneurial + real estate services	Public administration,	Teaching	Social and health services	Community services	high	medium	worker	Private senior high school	Private technical high school	Public senior high school	Public technical high school	VT
Discovery of the activity			X		XXX						XX	XX	XX								
Sizing up of the activity						X			X		X										
Reinforcement of the key aspect of work in life			X			X		X	X			X									
Naturalizing the activity			XXX	XXX	XXX	X	X					XX	XX								
Professionalization on the job			XXX																		
Dematerializing the work					XX						XX	XXX	XXX								
Grueling experience of the labor world			XXX																		

4. The sequences: theoretical and practical tools

Finally, the insertion sequences are an effort aimed at integrating the labor representations and practices to even more complex sets, in such a way that these factors may be analyzed at the same time and as they evolve.

These are not fixed structures. On the contrary, these are analytical operators which in themselves are dynamic in nature. The sequences mark a segment of the pathways of the young, i.e., they talk to a moment in their history. In this research, the sequences mark the first insertion, the first steps of the young towards the labor world. Other sequences will follow. Thus, different sequences will come up throughout the pathway, marking no longer a moment in life but a succession of moments and, hence, the full pathway (for which longitudinal consistent data are required).

Because these are not sequences of the individual life stories but labor insertion sequences, they may be generalized and we may find them in different pathways, which proves their heuristic value for sociology. The social distribution of the sequences – mentioned in the previous part – is a proof of this.

However, although we may identify social trends inside the sequences, we have also found exceptions to the rule, i.e., individual cases (pathways, labor insertions) falling outside what seems to be the predominant social characteristics of the sequence. What is interesting in these exceptions is to be able to identify what builds the exception, i.e., the factors generating a difference and fostering a distinguished labor pathway. Without delving into this issue, which would require a thorough analysis, one may say that there are institutional factors (for example, the fact of having been enrolled in training institutions, emphasizing the fostering of personal skills), social experiences (for example, participating in young social organizations) and family histories, among others, which contribute to guiding the insertion pathways, creating or reducing the array of opportunities for the young. This observation does not contradict the main assumption of the research, which stipulates that the pathways are built from a complex configuration of factors (as opposed to a reduced and predetermined list of elements). Conversely, the search for exceptions inside the sequences and, above all, the triggering factors of the exception is particularly interesting because it contributes to identifying those elements that will be stimulated or regulated in the framework of youth labor insertion policies.

This very last issue leads to a new reflection linked to the pragmatic interest of the sequences. If there are triggering factors that may guide the insertion towards one sequence or the other, is it also possible to value the sequences and assert that some of them are prone to be selected while others should be avoided? A positive answer to this question means that the sequences may become a new way of tackling the formulation of action programs, taking into account continuity and change, besides the time complexity and other difficulties, or a lengthy and complex youth labor insertion process.

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Motivations, experiences and projections. The incidence of training for work on the labor pathways of young women

By Verónica Millenaar

1. Introduction

For young people in Argentina, entering active life is not a simple road; and even less so if they are women. The difficulties they face to get into stable jobs and to uphold them over time have a double nature. On the one hand, the disadvantage faced by all young people; on the other hand, the fact of being women. This *double disadvantage* can be mainly seen on the gender segmentation existing on the labor market. But these structural limitations do not explain by themselves the way in which young men and women are linked to the job; one should also take into account their expectations, desires and life projects that go beyond the labor dimension in itself. In the present article we affirm that the *gender identities* play a relevant role in the way in which the young construct their labor pathways; either reinforcing their relationship to work or keeping them away from that experience as a function of other projects that are more central to their lives.

Likewise, we affirm that the intervention strategies aimed at specifically facilitating the labor insertion of the groups of most vulnerable young women manage to achieve significant impacts when they tackle aspects linked to their gender identities. In this framework, we wonder how participating in a labor-training course impacts on the pathways of young women. Why do young girls go to vocational training courses and what do they find in such experiences? Is it possible to consider such experiences as resources that will facilitate their insertion into the labor market?

We will try to provide some answers to these questions through the analysis of the labor pathways of young vulnerable women living in the city of Buenos Aires and in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city who assisted in two vocational training centers. The choice of these two centers is based on the specific views and strategies found therein vis-à-vis the gender identities linked to the workplace. That is why it is relevant to typify the institutional outlooks of both centers around their gender perspective to analyze afterwards the labor pathways of the young girls both before and after going to the training centers. As will be shown later on, the pathway analysis turned out to be a positive methodological resource to record the impacts of the course over a wider period and beyond the result of access to employment by these young girls.

2. Labor pathways from a gender perspective

A recent report on the labor conditions of the young in Argentina (PREJAL, 2008) shows that the youth unemployment rate (between 15 and 24 years of age) is 25.1%. But, if one takes a look only at the unemployment of young women the percentage climbs to 30.1%, and in the case of teenagers (up to the age of 19) to 42.3%. Besides, young women are largely affected by labor informality, which in their case reaches 68.6%. One should add to this that a great percentage of women, for reasons linked to maternity or gender mandates, remain inactive, thus increasing their risk and lack of social protection (Miranda, 2008).

The data mentioned above are indeed a reflection of the segmentations one sees on the adult labor market, offering less and worse jobs to women, especially to those living in poverty⁵⁶. However, the problem of youth labor insertion is not only linked to structural restrictions of the labor market. The way in which women and men are linked to employment is in turn tied to their gender identities that are in turn configured stemming from the different roles that are assigned to the genders. Regarding labor, the male position has historically been linked to the providing role and to going out to find a job, unlike the female role, linked to the upbringing of children and taking care of the home – and therefore far away from the salary jobs outside the domestic environment.

These historically allocated roles –also vastly resisted and questioned – serve as organizing diagrams of practices and speeches, and it is from them that both men and women configure their gender identities. However, subjects may be identified with such roles or not. Henrietta Moore (1994) argues that men and women are individuals built with multiple identifications, which never determine them unambiguously. Gender structure is a symbolic, rhetoric and lexical organization that is tied to fixed and permanent anchors. But the construction of individual gender identities may produce, reproduce, resist or change such speeches and structuring categories.

Thus, the way in which young people are identified to a symbolic gender structure –allocating specific roles to gender – is a core element having an impact on the links that both men and women build with their jobs. Thus, the fact of questioning such a structure may change these links with their jobs. It is also possible to think the other way around. Nicole Drancourt (1994), in a study of labor pathways of young French citizens, concluded that the way in which a job was given a meaning, a value and a conceptual place led to different labor pathways. The author saw, for example, that in some female pathways, because employment was tantamount to breaking the social mandate allocated to women, and hence a way of getting a personal achievement, the end result was that in spite of precarious pathways in the beginning, labor socialization could cumulate in a positive sense and result in more stable pathways over time. For these women, the strong *willingness* to work led to the configuration of a stable and cumulative labor pathway. This was not the case with other women whose link to the job was weaker or subsumed within the maternity project. The author suggests that the *relation to the activity* is an interesting clue to understand the configurations shaping the pathways of men and women and also to recognize how the gender identities are part of these.

Nevertheless, how does a labor-training course have an impact on the insertion possibilities of young women? Does such an experience have an impact on the strengthening or attribution of new meanings of their links to the job? In order to respond to these questions, we have analyzed the training experience of young women in the framework of their pathways, in order to acknowledge the impact of the course not only on improving their occupational states, but also on the potential changes in the way in which they view the job and they relate to the labor activity. As different papers have pointed out (Casal, 1996; Walter and Phol, 2007; Jacinto *et al.*, 2005; Longo, 2008), the pathway study is an analytical proposal that allows us to integrate various aspects of the constructions of the young and to combine a generational and social-historical analysis with the specificity introduced by certain biographies. We affirm that such a perspective introduced at least three advantages.

⁵⁶ Although the activities carried out by women have been growing at a sustained pace over the past decades, women still have a higher probability of remaining unemployed. The female participation rate increases, while at the same time unemployment or sub-employment are unevenly distributed between women and men, and even among women. Generally speaking, they are over-represented in those jobs linked to service tasks and to taking care of other people, and their salaries are usually lower than those of men, even when they carry out the same tasks (Wainerman, 2003). But, besides, when considering only women, a great polarization has taken place: those living in poverty are more exposed to lower quality jobs, jobs that are precarious and yield low wages.

The *first advantage* is the possibility of observing a series of biographical events and to add to them the impact of holding a position in the social structure (the educational and economic capital at hand, for example), as well as the subjectivity aspects of the young (motivations, projects, the meaning of work and study). Both dimensions allow us to acknowledge the restrictions and the resources the actors have when configuring their own pathways⁵⁷. This analytical perspective, integrating structural and subjective aspects, is relevant in the present context. In the absence of a labor market that manages to easily bring on board young workers and without the institutionalization that used to guarantee insertion into active life, transitions become more and more individualized. It is left to the young to build their own “roadmap” towards employment. The analysis of pathways allows us to register the particular constructions of the young (and the significant variation margins inside such constructions) in the framework of certain structural conditioning factors.

The *second advantage* lies in the possibility of integrating a gender perspective into the analysis of the young people’s constructions. Such perspective entails analyzing structural and determining elements (such as the existing segmentation on the labor market) as well as subjective factors linked to the male and female identities of these youngsters.

The *third advantage* comes from the possibility of tracking some of the footprints left by the passage through an institution in the pathways of the young. The experience of a training course may have significant effects, both in the configuration of their willingness to work (Jacinto and Millenaar, 2009) and in their gender identities. Such identities, which are sometimes perceived as hefty mandates that are too difficult to be eluded, may be envisaged stemming from institutional experiences.

In this chapter we wonder why young women go to labor-training courses, how they get there and what their motivations are, what their experiences are in those courses and what the impact of such experiences is in the construction of their future projects. The analysis is based on a sample of young women aged between 18 and 32 who enrolled and completed labor training courses in two selected institutions. Both institutions work with vulnerable young populations, vulnerable because of their economic condition and also because of their access to the employment circuits. An in-depth interview was carried out with these women between one and three years later, and their labor, educational and family experiences were reconstructed before they went into the training course and after they had completed it. The interview also looked into the assessment they make of such experiences, the meaning of the jobs, their projects and perceptions of the fact of being women and workers. The data used for this analysis come from 26 in-depth interviews, 18 of which took place directly with the young women and 8 with coordinators and members of the teaching staff of both organizations. That is the database from which the institutional perspectives to be covered henceforward was typified.

3. Two training strategies for the workplace: how to tackle the labor insertion of young women?

It isn’t just any labor training course that will allow women to get a job, and even less so in a formal labor market⁵⁸. How can one tackle the insertion of poor young women by using

⁵⁷ As indicated by Bourdieu, the restrictions and resources of each subject can theoretically be translated as the “objective conditioning factors” of social practice: the possibilities and impossibilities, support facilities and hurdles faced by science through its statistical studies written down as objective probability linked to group or class (Bourdieu, 2007). Although individual actions seem to adjust to such objective conditioning factors, there is always leeway in the way these are used by the actors. Subjective elements embedded in the constructions of the subjects play a relevant role in configuring their pathways.

⁵⁸ For example, it has been shown (Goren and Barrancos, 2002) that training in traditionally female specialties, (sewing, cooking, taking care of elderly people) reinforces the insertion of women in socially and economically less prestigious professions, and that, generally speaking, such jobs are informal in nature.

vocational training courses? With what strategies? It has been said that vocational training includes a gender perspective when it allows for the development of basic and attitude skills that improve the “employability” of women and when it promotes horizontal and vertical mobility (Silveira, 2001). This means enhancing the training offer to activities that are not typically feminine, as well as stimulating professional careers involving greater hierarchy and skilled jobs. Besides, it entails a gender perspective when it promotes, among women, the construction of a viable employment and training personal project, one that reinforces independence and empowerment of their decisions, in the framework of a rights perspective (Formujer, 2004). The “formula” would therefore be that a training course allows improving *the opportunities* of labor insertion, while at the same time offering greater information and promoting their *rights* as workers and as women.

These issues are not explained in the program design of the two vocational training centers to be analyzed herein. However, both institutions have gender perspectives and concrete ways of tackling the problem. As will be shown, one of the centers focuses on the *employability* of women and the other one on their *rights*. The first one is an NGO of the southern suburbs of the city of Buenos Aires, which we will call “Foundation”, implementing a training program for young women who are enrolled in the last years of high school. The second one is a provincial vocational training center, which we will call “Workshop”, located in the County of Tigre. It enrolls teenagers and young women of the neighborhood who may or may not have completed high school. Both the Foundation and the Workshop⁵⁹ organize comprehensive training. Besides providing knowledge on a specific task they promote a learning path of wider knowledge regarding the market place. However, the experiences of each of them are different, both in their intervention strategies and in their perspectives regarding the social and labor inclusion of the young. These perspectives allow them to capture different expectations regarding the labor insertion of women. Let’s see these expectations in each case.

3.1 The Foundation

The Foundation emphasizes the labor insertion of young people in those jobs they call “quality jobs” (formal employment). From the institutions’ perspective, the first step aimed at guaranteeing juvenile social inclusion is making sure they enter the labor market. As such, they provide courses that respond to market demand, mainly in the services sector, and a concrete link with formal jobs is created. The Foundation selects the boys and girls in a poverty situation who are finishing high school and who show a strong willingness to work once their course is over (that is a preclusive condition to enroll in the training course). A wide training focused on the skills demanded by the market is provided, mainly on those aspects linked to the willingness to work, responsibility, empowerment and service attitude.

When the Foundation speaks about gender discrimination it refers to a “piece of information” that typifies the labor market: they do not question it but they take it on board as one of the characteristics of the market in which a worker is supposed to evolve. This is a piece of information that must be particularly understood by women to find the strategies to fight it. One of those strategies consists in increasing the number of labor skills they have and building a wide labor profile that will allow them to find the cracks through which they will make sure they get a job. In this perspective, considering the scarce labor opportunities, a vast professional identity would allow the women to “revisit” themselves when detecting any job offer (for example, the training in catering they provide would allow women to work as waitresses in restaurants and hotels, as well as in hospitals and other places). The Foundation calls upon

⁵⁹ In Argentina, Vocational Training is aimed at young people and adults above 16 years of age. It entails courses of up to two years in length provided both from a public and private perspective, either through Civil Society Organizations or for-profit educational centers. The two centers selected belong to two different types of institutions: one is a public center working under an agreement with a not-for-profit organization while the other one is an NGO that does not provide official diplomas.

young people, boys and girls alike, “equaled” by the market rationale: in order to make sure there is a labor insertion you have to compete and the greater the number of skills you have the better your *competitiveness* will be.

Given the conditioning factors some women have in order to attend the courses (the obligation to take care of siblings, for example) the institutional resolution fosters their accountability when choosing. For the Foundation, the young women always have the possibility to choose and to hope to build their own future according to their own wishes, not necessarily following the script of what is expected of them. The gender mandates in this case become relative. The Foundation does not provide for any “support” to women (e.g., a nursery so that young mothers do not have to skip classes) but it guides them in their own labor/home planning process. Thus the “dilemma” that crops up in the real working environment will call for planning actions and choices.

The girls do not bring their babies here because this works as a labor environment. If you are at your workplace, you can't take your baby there. So, “what are you going to do? Who are you going to leave it with? How many hours are you going to work? Plan it”. What they cannot do is act irresponsibly and say, “Well, I don't know, I don't know”. Here we train people for the workplace (Director of the Foundation).

Thus, from the standpoint of the Foundation, in order to improve the labor opportunities of women, the right path is to provide them with a set of tools and skills that will be demanded by the market, which always gives preference to those who are detached, flexible and with no ties. In the case of women, this means what Arlie Hochschild (1997) called *zero drag*: people without preexisting links or emotional commitment, and without any aspiration to build them in the future.

3.2 The Workshop

The Workshop caters for a population with larger structural limitations: these are kids who, besides living in poverty conditions, have generally not completed high school (or even grade school sometimes) and live in a neighborhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires far from the labor opportunity circuits. The Workshop does not select the kids that will attend: it is open to the whole community. The purpose of the institution is not restricted to labor insertion. The emphasis has been placed on the youths' ability to acknowledge themselves as active drivers of their own pathways and to break the subjugation paradigm. It proposes an environment where kids may, besides learning a trade, know their rights as citizens and have more tools to configure their own life paths.

From the perspective of the Workshops coordinating team the gender mandates are strongly present in the practices and representation of the women of the neighborhood. As such, the intervention strategies are geared at making them see such mandates, to question them and to change their relationship vis-à-vis the labor activity. At any rate, there is not a clear view of a possibility to provide for labor insertion in formal jobs. The expectations of the Workshop are limited to the opportunity of creating new perceptions among the young, to encourage them to finish their studies or resume them and to connect them with organizations in the realm of the social economy. At any rate, labor insertion can never be achieved for the Workshop in the case of women if the imaginary dimension regarding their role in the family and in society is not taken into account.

In its discourse, the Workshop calls upon two types of subjects distinguished by gender: this necessarily means a specific treatment. Some courses are offered to women and others to men (for example sewing or cooking for women and the blacksmith trade or carpentry for men). Such a division can be construed as a reproduction of the typically male or female trades that reinforce the gender disparity. For the Workshop, however, it is a “strategy” to work on specific issues with one group and the other. In the case of women, such a strategy is considered an

opportunity for them to be acknowledged as a disadvantage group and speak out with their own voice.

When women are amongst themselves they speak without beating about the bush about things that they would not deal with in a mixed group. They just talk, they tell each other... maybe one of them was beaten up... and well, everything comes out. But if there are men around, things are not said. What counts is that they value themselves as people, that is the core. (Socio-labor Coordinator, the Workshop).

The hurdles women face to go to the workshop are dealt with in particular. In some cases, young mothers may go with their babies, be absent if the kids are crying or come to a shorter schedule. The intervention strategies are aimed at empowering the young girls through the acknowledgement of their capacities and knowledge. The idea is for them to be able to think about a life project, over and beyond learning a trade, a project that may or may not include a job, but which is the result of a personal construction and not of an unbending fate.

4. Young women: motivations, experiences and future projects

As has been shown, the institutions envision two social and labor inclusion horizons that are different. These formats and institutional logics are experienced in a particular manner by each of these young ladies. In the following sections we aim at typifying their pathways and recounting the impacts of the training courses on their labor and educational pathways as well as explaining their motivations and their expectations for the future. Such impact corresponds to the prior biographic constructions, i.e., the way in which the girls “arrive” at the institutions.

In this way, different “pathway profiles” were established at the time of enrollment onto the courses. These profiles were built from two sets of data. On the one hand, some of the *structural conditioning factors* of the young girls were traced at the moment of enrolling onto the courses (especially their educational levels and prior labor experience). On the other hand, the *subjective aspects* embedded in their choices regarding training and their labor activities were analyzed. In other words, the interest of the young girls themselves in attending these training courses, the way in which they assess their experiences in school and on the job and their future projects linked to a labor life were examined.

Thus, a group of young girls who had already had a labor experience, which was considered valuable and accumulative, were showing a *commitment* towards a stable and formal labor insertion. Another group of young girls, with no prior labor experience, had a relationship to the work that was linked to a search for a vocation. They shared the perception of *exploring*⁶⁰ the market place. Finally, a group of girls felt they were far from the labor experience. Most of them had had a prior labor experience but it was in the framework of a survival strategy. This group of girls may be distinguished because they were *looking for socialization*.

We may thus establish three groups of young people distinguished by their prior educational and occupational pathways and their relation to the labor activity, which we will analyze hereafter. The young women who attended one institution or the other were not homogeneously distributed among the three profiles. In the case of those attending the Foundation, a prerequisite for the Foundation was to show “a will to work”. Therefore, this group of young people was distributed between the *commitment* (5 women) and the *exploration* (4 women). In the case of the Workshop, the willingness to work was not a prerequisite. There are many women on those courses who work at home and look for other things when going to a training course. Most of those interviewed who went to the Workshop belong to the group of

⁶⁰ The motivations as told by the two first profiles of young girls resemble those called by Zacarés González *et al.* (2004) *exploration and commitment* vis-à-vis the workplace. The exploration speaks to the experimental period, an active questioning and evaluation or examination period between different labor alternatives. The commitment refers to the consolidation of a firm project, one that really means a commitment towards a labor activity.

young women who look for *socializing* (5 women). At any rate, there is a minority of *explorers* in the group (3 women) and a single case of being *committed*.

4.1 Committed young women

As mentioned before, a first group of young ladies, who already had some labor experience before going to the course, were *committed* to a stable labor insertion that would allow them to develop a professional career. They shared the perception according to which the labor activity was a task of vital importance in their lives and for their future projects. Most of the young girls in this group had not completed high school at the moment they attended the course (although all of them had the desire to complete it in the future). The prevailing factor was to enhance their labor insertion. Regarding the course, they said that the training proposal was consistent with their labor plan as established before. All of the girls in this group, having already worked, knew that they did have some practical experience but that they needed some kind of leap forward to enlarge their labor opportunities and access higher “quality” jobs.

It really struck me. Especially since there was a catering training. Because I already had some knowledge, it was what I liked, what I knew, I had worked in that field as a girl and I actually wanted to work in that sector. (Ana, 21 years old, Foundation, catering).

The young women in this group said they had “decided” to work when they started their labor pathway in order to pay for their personal expenses, to help their families or that they saw it as an opportunity to start a project that would be their own. What stands out in this group is the positive valuation about the jobs already performed (although most of them took place under precarious conditions) and the labor insertion itself that goes hand in hand with a personal achievement. They all agreed on the benefits of working outside their homes, as a way to gain personal satisfaction and self-appraisal.

The work is everything. It is what gives you dignity, what keeps you going if you want to start a project in your life: for everything you need to work. If a woman doesn't work, she doesn't prosper. They say a woman is valued more when she's working, when she's doing something with her life. (Dolores, 20 years old, Foundation, sales).

The girls that are committed say they have a strong will to grow professionally: it includes the desire to be formally trained. Besides talking about their own willingness, they say they count on the support of their families to work and go to classes. But here comes the difference between the young girls of the Workshop and those of the Foundation. In the case of the Workshop girl, such support was not so strong (she was divorced and had a child) and she would only remain on the course under the condition that her son could come with her. In the case of the Foundation, it was different. Precisely, one of the learning paths proposed at institutional levels is the fact of being able to efficiently deal with the “domestic dilemmas”. This is an implicit message for the young girls, who receive it in that manner.

How did you manage with your kids? Could you come with them? Could you bring them with you?

- I don't know whether I could bring them, I didn't ask, I suppose I couldn't. At any rate I wouldn't have brought them. It isn't right because I am being trained here. I couldn't possibly bring my kids and learn at the same time. (Dolores, 20 years old, Foundation, sales).

The experiences of the courses underscored by the young committed women also varied between those who went to one institution or the other. The experience of the Foundation girls is basically focused on the possibility of learning to be more competitive workers (and to become employable). In that center, work always comes first and that allows the young ladies to envision more directly what is expected of a worker in a specific work place. That reflects the working rationale of that center. In the Foundation, the main tool expected to be provided to the

young girls is the *reflection* capacity⁶¹. The learning process as mentioned by the girls is specifically aimed at teaching them the strategies needed to carry out a “management of themselves”: to know how to handle things, to organize themselves and to “sell themselves” for the jobs.

I learned to feel more secure. To know that when you're talking to the other person you're selling yourself, without saying, "I am the best", but with the right words, to let the other one know that one is the best for the job (...). I changed and improved a lot. To talk, to speak with my hands, to organize my time, all of these things I have been bringing them on board. (Dolores, 20 years old, Foundation, sales).

In the case of the young committed woman who went to the Workshop, the experiences that stand out are different. To begin with, the training received allowed her to have different attitudes; the course taught her to involve with a group and that is a key issue to feel comfortable in a labor environment. Second, the certificate received from the course becomes a tool to be more self-demanding regarding the insertion in a better job than those held thus far:

It was a very good experience, to get some training, to get contacts (...) I was never satisfied with the jobs I had because they weren't what I was looking for. The experience provided by the course let me see that I wanted something more for me. (Karina, 32 years old, Workshop, computing).

Now, if the pathways prior to the course of these committed girls were marked by the fact that they were strongly focused on a labor experience, what happened after training?

Most of the girls, at the time of the interview, had managed not only to change jobs and join a formal employment structure, but also to make it sustainable over time. Such is the case with the young girls who went to the Foundation, to the extent that it is the Foundation that provides the support to get an effective insertion. Of the two cases for which this did not happen, one was a pupil of the workshop, who, although she had a job, was underemployed and was not fully satisfied with her condition. However, all of the young girls agreed they had been able to set up an *occupational project*. This includes their personal management, both in a training plan and a career plan.

In spite of the improvement of the labor condition of the young girls of this group, it is interesting to point out that many of them complained about the jobs they had had, essentially about their wages. This was clearly visible among the catering workers: girls used to get lower wages than their male counterparts for the same tasks carried out. Besides, they also argued they had fewer benefits than their male counterparts. However, they did agree (in accordance with the discourses of the Foundation) that such a situation shouldn't become an obstacle. In view of such discrimination, women have to behave securely, poise and “make a place for themselves”.

I feel my classmates are sometimes not well treated. But I believe that this is essentially due to one's own attitude, to the way you face the situation. I myself have not been despised so far, or anything like that. At least I have a pretty strong personality. (Ana, 21 years old, Foundation, catering).

- Well, maybe they prefer the boys (...) It's a matter of how much will you put into it. There's no free lunch.

- And you get along well with the boys?

- Yes, very well. I'm just another little guy. (Flavia, 20 years old, Foundation, catering).

The committed girls feel differently from the rest of the women, with more personality, more self-assurance and being to a certain extent more “masculine”, so as to be able to enter the labor

⁶¹ Reflection is an interesting learning process in two senses: because of the “reflective know-how” that is required by the contemporary capitalism market place – requiring workers who are self-organized and self-controlled (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002) – and because of the possibility to configure labor pathways in the framework of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2007).

world. Their ties to the job were strong before they started the course and they would uphold that after they graduated. If we analyze the impact of having participated in the courses in terms of gender we may say that the possibility of insertion in a stable and formal job is *a fact* for most of these young women. However, that opportunity, which was farther away before the course – does not mean they will get the same wage and conditions as their male counterparts. Girls manage to get hired for jobs that are linked to the masculine world (such as catering) but they do so by harshening their personality, by “behaving like little guys” and by accepting less pay than the boys. Regarding the meanings allocated to the labor activity and their life projects as women, there are apparently no changes, only a reinforcement of their commitment to work.

4.2 Young women explorers

A second group of girls was distinguished from the previous one because they hadn't had any labor experience before the course and because their link to the workplace was that of a search for a vocation. Insertion in the workplace was not their main goal, although it was a strategic action embedded in a future professional project. Because of the characteristics of the profile, this group gathers together the youngest girls. The prevailing factor for them was a study project and the desire to *explore* a labor experience. Most of these girls were about to finish high school when they entered the training course and they wanted to keep on studying. They knew they would have to work to pay for their expenses and therefore they would look for a job to accomplish that. On the other hand, the course was interesting in the framework of a strategy of accumulation: to accumulate certificates, experiences, learning processes, etc.

I wanted to finish high school and to have at least some experience in something because it's easier to get a job when you have some experience... I went into a frenzy to do everything in one year... every certificate or diploma you get is important. (Cecilia, 19 years old, Workshop, cooking).

The course was perceived as an opportunity to be “better positioned” when tackling the labor market; it was one more learning tool given the uncertain future after high school. Likewise, in the case of the girls who had already completed high school, it allowed them to remain active. Having “nothing to do” after high school was distressing; the course was a way to keep on studying and to carry out an activity as close as possible to a real job.

I wanted to do something besides spending all day at home. I wanted to do something and to learn something else. To have a basis to go and find a job because I had never worked. (Mariana, 19 years old, Foundation, sales).

The group of explorer girls is marked by strong family support. To go out and find a job is not a need in itself nor is it a personal achievement project, but an assessment approach towards a professional project for the long run. Such a project includes, besides studying, the construction of a family. In this sense, the strategy is to explore various options, and, in the future, to get a job that will also allow them to be mothers.

Regarding their experiences during the courses, they all agree that they have learnt how to work although they have never actually worked. They also say that they have felt the gender discrimination that exists in the labor market. They know what real labor offers and what the situations that may come up are, like insinuations, abuse or impropriety by future customers or co-workers. The girls are indeed coached regarding these hypothetical (but possible) situations.

Actually, they talk to you about things that could happen if somebody insinuates something, bothers you or things like that. (Eugenia, 19 years old, Foundation, catering).

Although the pathways of these girls were focused on a vocational and labor exploration, let us see what happened after the course. It is interesting to note that, at the time of the interview, only one of them had not managed to complete high school (but she was finishing it in an adult school). The goal to finish and continue studying was very strong in this group and could clearly be seen in the future projects of these youngsters. Most of them had started tertiary or

university study (not without some “bumps along the way” which ultimately means they were also in the process of vocational scouting). Indeed, in some cases, the course allowed them to confirm a given academic choice or to discover a vocation that they didn’t know of before.

I realized that I liked cooking. And one day, when I’m older, I’d like to have a baking business of my own, I love baking cakes. (Cecilia, 19 years old, Workshop, cooking).

All of the young women explorers who had studied at the Foundation had managed to get a formal job (although two of them had not been able to sustain it over time). Conversely, among the young girls having gone to the Workshop, such an achievement hadn’t been so easy. In one case, the “formal” job had indeed arrived, but didn’t last long: the contract was not renewed after the initial three months. This goes to show that training the young explorers has more visible consequences when complemented with concrete support into the insertion period, as is the case with the Foundation.

In any case, it is interesting to see that in spite of the institutional support, some situations occur to the young girls as “additional” obstacles that hamper their ability to hold down a job. One such case is that of a young girl who graduated from the Foundation and started to work as a waitress in a bar, but having become pregnant found it difficult to keep the job. After almost two years she finally quit and decided to take some time to stay at home with her son. Difficulties also crop up when one wants to keep a full-time job and also study at the university. For example, a young girl decided to quit her job and look for a part-time job.

In the explorers group, the courses have an impact on the willingness to work and the improvement of employability. In terms of gender, both aspects are important to expand the labor opportunities of working women. In any case, the ambiguity that comes up when faced with the situation of becoming a mother (which puts study and work projects into tension), may prevent the possibility of keeping a job although it may be formal and well remunerated. The insertion does not by itself solve the problem of those women who, although they wish to work, do not do so “unconditionally” – as is the case with the committed girls. The job obtained is subject to the young girls’ situations. It is precisely labor intermittence (i.e., frequent job interruptions) that constitutes a significant problem in the female labor pathways.

4.3 Young women who are looking for socialization

A third group of ladies felt they were far away from a labor experience. They shared the perception of labor as an activity that must be carried out at times but is not chosen. Most of them had indeed had a prior labor experience but one linked to a survival strategy (in general, in short term and precarious jobs). Most of them were already mothers, focused on bringing up their kids and doing the house chores; and that was their main project for the future. All of the girls in this group studied at the Workshop. As mentioned before, that institution accepts and fosters the enrollment of women (and also men) who do not necessarily wish to work at the end of the courses. The motivations for gaining access to the course, therefore, are more general in nature: getting to know friends, participating in a leisure experience or learning to carry out day-to-day chores at home. Other young girls said they had participated almost “by inertia”: the Workshop is in their neighborhood, it offers interesting courses, many people in the neighborhood go there, it is one more activity for the community. This group of girls stood out from the rest because they were looking for a *socialization activity*.

None of the young girls in this last group had completed high school (in some cases not even grade school) when they enrolled on the courses. Thus, training was an opportunity to renew their link with an educational institution after a number of school failures. It was also a way of spending their “spare” time:

I came to this computer course because I wasn’t going to school anymore and honestly I didn’t want to find a job. As I didn’t want to do anything we said, well, let’s see what happens with the Workshop. (Paola, 22 years old, Workshop, computing).

As mentioned before, most of the young ladies in this group had had some prior labor experience but it was not positively valued. The jobs, in general, were carried out to economically assist the family in times of need (especially when the economic crisis of 2001 and the following years came about). To find a job was an obligation given the fact that they were poor and they needed to survive economically. Some of these young girls agree that if they could choose they would prefer not to work. The wish of the majority is to start a family and to bring up their kids (although, as we will see later on, such impressions changed throughout the courses and once they were completed).

- *What was your reason for deciding to come to work in that time frame?*

- *Well, because we are a poor family and when you're young and you want certain things you have to go and work (...) I go to work because I need to. But if I didn't have to I'd stay home and bring up my daughters.*

- *You would prefer staying at home...*

- *Yes, obviously. If I had the money I'd stay home. (Adriana, 29 years old, Workshop, computing).*

Regarding the experiences in the courses, the young women looking for socialization spoke mainly about their social participation: what is valued is having set up a group, having become part of an institution. They underscore the learning of things linked to their rights as women, both inside their families and in the labor environment. This reflects the main focus of the Workshop, which promotes the participation of the young and their grasping of their rights. Besides, such a learning process is encouraged by the fact that only women go to these courses. Strikingly enough, far from perceiving it as discrimination, some young girls in the group valued this as a positive fact because otherwise they would feel uncomfortable.

- *I think it's a good thing that they divide us into boys and girls*

- *Why do you think they divide you?*

- *No idea, probably because cooking is a thing for women and so is sewing. That's probably it. I don't know. I prefer it that way. (Camila, 20 years old, Workshop, sewing).*

Besides, the young girls also positively value the chance they have of attending the training course with their babies or small kids. As mentioned before, the Workshop's strategy is to generate resources that will counterbalance the absence or weakness of the institutional support that should be provided by the State to women. The workshop thus becomes a form of institutional "support". The course allows the girls to meet people and to enter a contention network. On the other hand, the course is a space out of home, their own space where it is possible for them to "breathe".

I always do something that allows me to have my daughter with me, to see her, for her to know that I'm around. (...) Here they helped me very much because I could bring her. Because otherwise I would have had to look for someone that would babysit her, somebody I would have to pay. (Adriana, 29 years old, Workshop, computing).

The course helped me to get out of the house, I needed to get out of that place, to breathe a little bit. It was an excuse, it was my time. I came here and settled a bit. Besides, I knew nobody in the neighborhood. And here I could speak to someone, I then became friends with a number of girls. (Andrea, 22 years old, Workshop, sewing).

In the case of the young girls looking for socialization, it is interesting to note the significant changes introduced by the course. Although some girls upheld their pathways after their training period (they did not resume studying and remained inactive while taking care of their kids), in many other cases the experience significantly changed their situation. Such was the case, for example, of two young girls who, after having finished the course, got a job (in one case in a formal environment). These youngsters said that they had been stimulated by what they had learnt in the Workshop and that they had dared "to show what they know". Another case was

that of a young woman who after the experience on the course decided to resume her high school studies at a school for adults and who, at the time of the interview, was completing it. In this last case, deeper effects are felt, such as the possibility of being better appraised by her kids: now she does have her studies and her training. The course allowed her to set new goals and expectations regarding a labor project, even accepting that this could bring about conflicts with her partner (who prefers to see her in her housewife role).

I found out about high school here, I was just going to the computer course. Then I went and enrolled (...) and you know what's the best thing? That now I can help my daughter with her homework. That's really important. That's what the course taught me to do and it has changed me (...) And now I wish to finish high school, to try and study something, to graduate and be able to work (...) I will study something that has job prospects. Because I cannot be dependent on my husband all my life. He didn't really want me to start working, but I already started talking to him. (Adriana, 29 years old, Workshop, computing).

To some extent, the course “pushes” them to think about a project of their own, outside the role that is sometimes imposed on them by their families. The possibility of sharing the course during a full year with other women allows them to speak out some intimate issues which otherwise would not be placed in words. This situation, in some cases, creates a substantial change in these women, especially regarding the gender relationships inside the household. Besides, the young girls of this group talk about the opportunity of re-appraising the knowledge they had before (very often disregarded because of the gender division of labor), in order to imagine a career.

You know what? This is madness. The sewing course helped many of us to open our eyes. Really. To be able to say “why should we be patronized, forced not to do what we want?” I don't know, it meant something (...) With one of the Workshop's teachers we were looking at the way we would prepare a resume. I remember very well a conversation with her. For example, you go to a kindergarten. And you know how to sew and wash. But you want to be a teacher, so you only mention things related to that. And she would say, “Why don't we put down everything we know how to do?” Now I put down everything. (Andrea, 22 years old, Workshop, sewing).

Within the group looking for socialization, the most visible impact of the course is the encouragement to be willing to work (which in some cases means an effective labor insertion, made easier with the support of the institution in terms of enlargement of the social network). Besides, some young girls go back to high school and they start to build an autonomous life project, outside the realm of their homes. In any case, the footprints of the course are also visible in the deep revisiting of their roles as mothers and wives and their future projects. Although the impact in objective terms may not be as concrete as those of the previous groups, they are still significant in subjective terms, particularly so regarding the questioning of the traditional gender mandates. This is the group where such rethinking is most visible.

5. Conclusions

The path towards employment is not a simple transition for the young women. As we have seen, this path is the result of labor market segmentation but also of the meaning given to the labor activities as constructed upon gender identities. According to the profiles of the young women analyzed, we have seen that their decisions and motivations regarding their labor insertion and the training that was provided to them are very strongly anchored by their links to the job place. A solid and committed relationship with the job (far away from the traditional mandate asking them to remain at home) is the driver behind stable and cumulative labor pathways. In this vein, we argue that the relationships with the activity are linked to wider perspectives of these young women vis-à-vis the place that work should occupy in their lives. At the same time, through all this analysis we were able to acknowledge that rebuilding the links to the work place (which

includes questioning the gender role) has a significant impact on those young women that are farther away from a labor experience.

In the case of the *committed* girls, the links to the work place are reinforced precisely because they feel they are different from the others. The commitment with the labor insertion, besides being a consequence of an economic need, is tied to a perception of themselves as strong women who can and must be able to do the same as the boys. In the case of this group, their experience in the course reinforces such a perspective and provides strategies to become more competitive. Thus, the gender discriminations on the labor market are not questioned, they are accepted as a condition. That a woman may find her place inside a labor market and keep it depends on her own will to do so. This is in agreement with the research of female experiences on the workplace, showing that their capacity to streamline their family, private and emotional lives is the most important condition to efficiently get an insertion into the labor market, according to the requirements of the modern day labor world (Hochschild, 2008). In all cases, this does not prevent the young women in this group from pointing out the unfair conditions to which they are exposed by the sheer factor of being women (in terms of wage gaps, for example).

In the case of the young women who are undergoing an *exploration* period regarding their professional project, the meanings given to labor have multiple horizons. These include most notably studying, although also the future creation of a family. The young explorers consider that attending the course is a strategy to carry out a vital project with a greater scope. Among the things learnt during the courses they highlight the possibility of being more willing to work: a lesson that goes hand in hand with becoming adults. In any case, although in some cases there is actually an effective labor insertion, the job may not always be sustained in the long run. This is due to the contingent nature of their labor project vis-à-vis situations that may crop up in their lives and force them to quit. In this vein, although the scouts wish to work and claim that a woman may have a working role just as well as a man, their professional projects are not so hefty and they may become diluted if something else comes into the picture. Hence the ambiguity of many of these women when faced with a labor project but then also an educational and family project which generates many movements in- and out of a job, hampering their cumulative labor pathways.

The link to the work place as described by the group of young women who are *looking for socializing* is totally different. For them, work is tantamount to obligation and need, as a woman has a more important role to play within the household. This perspective changes over time during the course. The training, in spite of not promoting an effective labor insertion, does lead the young women to revisit the meaning of work, which, in some cases, also includes a deep rethinking of their own role inside the family and to define a project of their own. In this group, although labor insertion did not seem to be a source of motivation to participate in the courses, it became a possibility hoped for by the pupils after they had graduated from the course. In objective terms there are no substantial changes in the pathways of this group but there are new perspectives and horizons and even the configuration of a project that is totally different than the one they had in mind before entering the course.

The differences between the populations going to one and the other course are worth underscoring. These differences may be explained by the different educational levels of the young ladies but also by their willingness to work at the time of the beginning of the course. As mentioned before, this is a precondition to be enrolled in the Foundation (that is why its population is distributed between the first two groups). Besides these differences, we also find the institutional intervention rationale that separates the labor pathways of the youth even more further down the road. In the case of the Foundation, such an intervention includes the link with actual jobs. This has a strong impact on the labor insertion of those women who attend these courses.

As shown, a training course does not always resolve the labor market segmentations, nor the many demands faced by the women in order to sustain a career, even when the institution

facilitates their insertion into stable and formal jobs. Although their employability is indeed enhanced, it seems more difficult to manage to get equivalent labor opportunities for women and men. On the other hand, the structural disadvantages are a drag that is difficult to overcome in the pathways of many poor young women, especially those who have no high school degree or labor experience. In any case, we have seen how each institution prepares its own strategies to respond, within the realm of its own possibilities, to the needs of the populations in which it works. In this context, the pathway analysis allows us to understand that although the structural aspects are a really important conditioning factor, the interventions aimed at creating changes in the young women's subjectivities may lead to new goals and expectations for them which, in turn, will in the future foster pathways with greater inclusion.

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Labor socialization revisited: internships as a response to the uncertainties of youth labor transitions

By Claudia Jacinto and Carolina Dursi

Unemployment, precariousness, and the breakup of linear pathways turn the entry into the labor world into an uncertain transition, a transition in which some young people (those who have margins of freedom) prefer to choose postponement strategies (Mauger, 1998). The vocational and occupational decisions are also made with less determination and more fluctuation and thus employment no longer plays a key role in the establishment of a social identity for most of the youth.

However, not all the young people may develop these postponement strategies because they have to get the income needed for their families and themselves. Thus they begin to be active sometimes even before having finished high school. As many authors have written since Dubar (1991), early work experience is crucial for a basic occupational identity, which is actually a projection of oneself into the future, along with an expected labor pathway and a learning or training strategy.

In this framework, the issues regarding labor socialization mechanisms such as internships⁶² become absolutely of the essence. These mechanisms may have an impact on the uncertain entry process into the labor market. Beyond its traditional meaning of learning in context and becoming a complement to high school training, this chapter examines the *subjective meanings* of internships for young high school graduates and compares the experiences of different types of young people, according to their social-educational profiles and the ways in which these internships are managed at the school level. Three schools were selected for this survey. The internships covered very different objectives in each of them and they were also integrated in a different manner into the training dynamics⁶³.

The chapter⁶⁴ has been organized in three parts. The first one covers the breakup of the socialization mechanisms, their consequences for the labor insertion processes of the young and the extent to which such processes contribute to reappraising new dimensions related to the internships. The second part examines different internship models adopted by the schools, and the third one displays both the subjective outlooks of the graduates regarding the knowledge acquired during the internships as well as their impact on the labor insertion that took place afterwards.

As this is a topic that has been widely debated regarding its potential contributions and the abuse to which they may be exposed, we wish to point out that we have examined the potential *positive* outcomes of the internships in the labor socialization of the young in the present-day social context. These potential effects depend, of course, on the conditions (regulations, standards, institutions) under which they are carried out and the respect for the intern and his/her status as a student.

⁶² Since the end of 2008, a new law (No. 26.427) repeals the national decree that governed the internships at high school level. Another decree, as well as a national bill to take internships into account, is presently under discussion. Nevertheless, some jurisdictions use their own standards in this field.

⁶³ The data gathered from the schools are the results of interviews of the principals; and the data from the youth are based on semi-open interviews (with both open and closed questions) made to a qualitative sample of 26 young boys and girls interviewed at least one year after graduating from three different high schools of the city of Buenos Aires and the outskirts of the city.

⁶⁴ The chapter uses some of the results mentioned by Jacinto and Dursi, 2010.

1. Conceptual discussion

1.1 The breakup of labor socialization mechanisms and changes in the construction of an occupational identity

What has happened in the face of the breakup of the traditional labor socialization mechanisms?

The theory as contributed by a number of authors assists us in understanding the scope of such a breakup. Dubar (1991) argues that a crisis has come about in the construction of the social identities linked to the workplace. And this is so because the identity is a result, stable and provisional, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographic and structural, of different socialization processes which are built together by the individuals and defined by the institutions, which are nowadays undergoing profound changes. Among the most relevant events for the construction of a social identity, the exit of the school system and the confrontation with the labor market are key moments. The possibilities of constructing a basic occupational identity will depend, to a great extent, as we have shown, on the results of such first confrontations.

These confrontations adopt diverse social shapes according to the countries, the typical training-work system prevailing in those countries (Verdier, 2008), and the social, economic and cultural attributes of the individuals. Considering the weakening of the weight of modern social integration institutions, education and work, the individual strategies of the subjects become more and more relevant. Considering a society that continuously threatens the inclusion networks, individualization becomes almost compulsory (Robles, 1999). In other words, subjects must develop certain skills and trust those skills in order to make decisions that will satisfy their needs and anchor their personal roadmap.

What are the dimensions reflecting these new ways to connect to the labor world and what is the knowledge comes into play in order to confront the uncertainties of labor transitions?

To begin with, there has been a **decentralization of the workplace in the construction of social identities for the young**. The place that used to be occupied by “work ethics” seems to have been replaced by “consumption aesthetics”, rewarding the intensity and diversity of experiences, including those of the labor environment, looking for immediate payoffs, monetary and existential, new and flexible (Pérez Islas and Urteaga, 2001). Paradoxically, such decentralization of the work culture in the establishment of social identities is useful for the employment crisis. For some young people, labor is blurred as a personal organization axis, although one must distinguish between the various socio-economic situations and the cultural and social capital, age stages, etc., in order to understand these processes in depth.

Second, the **relationship to the activity** has changed, i.e., the tendency to work, the vision of employment, understood as a strategic potential, the result of a series of situations and producing future conditions within the dynamics of a continuous construction process of social identity (Nicole-Drancourt and Rolleau-Berger, 2001).

Third, the **construction and recognition of knowledge and the definition of “vocation” have also come into play**. Indeed, social identity is inseparable from the knowledge and the skills legitimacy spaces (Dubar, 1991). One has to count on (institutional and individual) acknowledgement of one’s skills by others and design the projects, expectations and potential identities needed to construct a basic occupational identity. What the young must achieve is not only a vocation, occupation or diploma, but also the personal construction of an identity strategy that includes their own image, the appraisal of their own skills and the realization of their own desires (Dubar, 1991).

The definition of **work knowledge itself is under constant change**. The knowledge considered to lead to professions is far from being only technical in nature. Actually, the definition of what is technical is also changing with the expansion of the services sector. On the one hand, the

knowledge used in the labor world is inseparable from its implementation, i.e., the skills. These are put to the test in solving concrete problems under labor conditions that have different margins of uncertainty and technical complexity. This entails both theoretical knowledge and “knowhow” and “knowing how to be”. In many sectors it becomes more and more known that social skills tend to have a priority over sheer technical skills (Stroobants, 1995). The development of the services sector and the reappraisal of the so-called “soft skills” also go in the same direction (Steedman, 2007). This knowledge, also known as social-labor knowledge, entails certain attitudes that are the result of a particular processing carried out actively by each subject as a function of different factors such as his/her family situation, real life experience on the job, educational achievements, etc. (Gallart and Jacinto, 1997). In other words, the skills do not come from the successful completion of a formal school curriculum but from an exercise whereby different kinds of knowledge elements are put to the test in critical situations (Ropé, 1994). In that case, **the learning of the working knowledge is at the crossroads of the configuration of relationships between the world of education and the labor world both from an educational system perspective and an institutional perspective, and in the trajectories of the individuals themselves.**

From the standpoint of the individuals, obviously they are not all in the same situation facing such processes: the personal stories usually reflect the limits imposed by the macro-structural conditioning factors and the institutional weakening process. However, subjects do develop strategies (including the management of very often scarce resources) and expectations within their room for maneuver. In this sense, the strategies of the young may be activated or inhibited regarding the exchange of resources between different areas of life (family, professional, personal, social). A young person managing to have positive exchanges between the different areas of his/her life, mobilizing skills and obtaining acknowledgement from others, will be better positioned to take ownership of the opportunities that come his/her way regarding both education and employment (Dupuy and Almudever, 1998).

Thus, the trajectories of the young may reflect activation of the resources and construction of knowledge through various experiences, combining formal education, learning on the job and maybe non-formal education as well as learning coming from other tiers of one’s life. Within this variety of experiences, internships seem to be revamped, as shown by international trends, which are giving a new momentum to co-operative education programs.

1.2 The new subjective meanings of internships

What have been the historical meanings of internships and what has changed in the present breakup context in the mechanisms of labor socialization?

As mentioned above, for many years the internship has been considered a training tool complementary to the theory and the practice provided by the academic institution itself; a privileged mechanism to get closer to the labor world (Jacinto and Millenaar, 2007), also considered the most efficient way to develop skills “in context” (Jacinto, 2009). It introduces the students to the routines and rituals of a true working place, as well as to the professional codes, values and standards of a labor context⁶⁵.

One of the key arguments of this chapter is that the practices carried out in actual labor contexts have acquired new meanings in view of the breakup of the traditional labor socialization processes. Indeed, for a youth who has only gained access to precarious labor opportunities or who has never worked, having an *assisted exploration* experience may be a valuable opportunity to get to know the rules of the game of the labor world, the corresponding interpersonal

⁶⁵ Likewise, for the social actors at stake, the schools and the companies, internships play a linking role between education and labor. For the school, they are a training complement that they provide and which give the students a view of the labor world that attracts them. For companies, the relationship with the school creates contacts with potential employees and it is a selection, induction and training strategy for future employees.

relationships, and what is expected of him or her not only in terms of specific knowledge and problem solving but also in terms of attitudes.

Following the same rationale, many pieces of research have begun to point out some dimensions of the impact of internships on the present day socio-labor context.

Thus, Marhuenda, Navas and Pinazo (2004) have pointed out that providing a significant experimentation experience of the labor world gives the young a better definition of their own future expectations, reappraising at the same time work itself and their own selves. The idea is to move them away from the negative and stigmatizing image with which they are very often identified and with which they sometimes actually identify themselves. In this vein, there is a possibility for them to revisit **their own attitudes vis-à-vis certain job or the continuation of their higher education.**

Zacarés González, Ruiz and Llinares Insa (2004) have argued that the training for labor programs (and we apply such an analysis to the internship) is a space for **exploration and commitment, as well as a definition space for goals and expectations.** The exploration refers to a period of experimentation, active questioning and evaluation or examination of different alternatives before making decisions on goals, values and beliefs. The commitment, for its part, supposes the adoption of a relatively firm resolution on identity elements and the involvement in a significant activity aimed at materializing such a choice. One of the main tools at the disposal of such training-for-work mechanisms is the *motivation* they generate, understood in the sense of “voluntary obligation”.

Forner and others (1996), point out that internships contribute to develop a **professional or vocational maturity** in the young, i.e., the potential to make efficient decisions in terms of training and employment. These authors also underscore the potential of internships to streamline and motivate students for present and future studies.

Dupuy and Almudever (1998) have examined the contribution in terms of social support as experienced by the young. To do so, they distinguish between the perceived *cognitive support*, corresponding to advice and assessments, and the perceived *emotional support*, which is related to the possibility of trusting others and developing trust feelings in themselves. The perception of these two types of support by the young would be linked to the involvement of the participants in the program, on the one hand, and to the evolution of the control feelings of the young, on the other⁶⁶.

Finally, another dimension of the analysis of the new meanings of internships relates to the **equity and possibilities of experimenting and learning about a formal working environment, particularly for those young coming from poor origins.** A number of authors point out evidence of this. Shuetze (2004) argues that in the co-operative education programs aimed at vulnerable populations, the familiarization with the labor world is a priority over and above the goals of acquiring concrete skills. Following the same line, Forner and others (1996) point out that the “support” mechanisms linked to internships are better taken advantage of by the young with lower qualification levels. As indicated in a prior paper (Jacinto, 2007), the generation of mechanisms that will bring the young closer to a quality labor world is one of the ways of encouraging equal opportunities among the young.

2. The different institutional approaches to internships

In order to understand the potential contribution of internships in the training of the youth to the new knowledge required by their labor insertion, one must first classify different types of approaches and the goals of these internships within the institutional dynamics followed by the

⁶⁶ Defined as an individual’s representation of the link existing between his or her own behavior and/or personal characteristics, on the one hand, and the positive or negative impact that s/he perceives, on the other.

school. Three establishments have been selected following a methodological criterion of strategically chosen cases. A typology of the schools studied, on the basis of the position they accord to internships in their training curricula and the characteristics of the school population involved, is described hereafter.

We have called *school No. 1* a “traditional” technical and industrial school created in 1960, receiving a heterogeneous population of students. Among the parents of the pupils we find a range of people, from those who are unemployed to workers in important corporations who did themselves finish high school. Located in the city of Buenos Aires, it has 480 students on roll, is well equipped and awards the degree of Electro-mechanic Technician majoring in electric power. The internship model introduced was classified as “*consolidated and integrated, as part of the technical and socio-professional training*”. It is called *consolidated* because the internships started a number of years ago, in 2000 to be precise, stemming from requirements coming both from the productive sector and the schools’ strategy aimed at providing the pupils with a concrete link to the labor world and with the new profiles required by society. *Integrated* means that the internships are part of a curriculum, in other words they are assessed (by the tutor of the pupil in the company) as one more topic. On the other hand, by enrolling in the internship program they are exempted from going to the workshops taught in the other shift^{67 68}.

We have called *school No. 2* an establishment founded in 1974 and located in a popular neighborhood on the northern outskirts of the second belt of the Buenos Aires suburbs. Although it had a commercial orientation in the beginning, after the 1990’s reform stage it also took on board the general high school diploma with a focus on the production of food products and services. The population of the school is quite heterogeneous, ranging from the children of unemployed people with serious socio-economic problems, as well as family problems, to the children of workers and schoolteachers, all of them living in the area. It has a good reputation among the local population and the enrollment counts around 1000 pupils. The school has signed internship agreements with two important companies as well as some SMEs installed in the area. We have classified the internship model of the school as being “*restricted, with emphasis on complementary training in an actual labor environment*”. A number of characteristics explain this title. *Restricted* means that the internship program: a) has been recently created, came from an external stimulus (a company association stimulating the model invited the institution to take part in it) though it did respond to a wish of the principals of the school who hadn’t managed to do that before; b) is not part of the curriculum; c) only covers part of the students (20% of those of that year) that have been “selected” to do the internship as a result of their good school reports; d) is not directly evaluated by the school (although the school is in touch with the tutors of the company). We believe the school views the internship as a “*complementary training in an actual labor environment*” because, among its goals, emphasis has been placed on the acquisition of updated technical knowledge, socio-professional and personal skills, and that the young people get a first labor experience through a task that is linked to what they have learnt in the classroom (we will see later on what the perspectives are in this field).

We have called *school No. 3* an establishment located in the southern area of the city of Buenos Aires, next to a slum where most of the pupils, approximately 300, come from. It offers two options: commercial high school and general high school with orientation specialization in Sanitary Statistics. It was created in 1990, as a municipal school, stemming from an initiative of the local government to provide for an extension of schooling in poor areas. As one may imagine, there are serious social problems around the school, and these have an impact on the neighborhood and their households, including violence among students and teenage pregnancy.

⁶⁷ Translators note: for students studying in the morning shift, the workshops are taught in the afternoon, and vice-versa.

⁶⁸ On the other hand, the school proposes to all students, as part of their training, workshops where they prepare a resume and they have job interviews as an orientation for the moment when they will have to look for a job on the market. There’s also a job billboard linking the graduates from the school with companies looking for people who got the diploma awarded by the school.

Classes are taught in the evenings, as many pupils work during the day. That is precisely why the school also hosts those young kids who are undergoing their second or third experience in a school. The goals of the school are inclusion, retention and promotion of its pupils; and because of the reasons mentioned above, it is flexible regarding absences, behavioral problems and the demanding requirements of the topics taught. The internship model implemented by this school has been classified as “*restricted, with emphasis on a quality labor experience*”. *Restricted* because: a) only a few young people carry out these internships every year (those with the best marks, for which it becomes a kind of “prize”, 20% enrolled that year); b) the program started as an external stimulus (an initiative from the town hall of the city); c) the work program is not part of the curriculum and they do not see it becoming so because of the many other priorities of that same school⁶⁹. And we refer here to the emphasis on a *quality labor experience* because the internship is not a practical experience in an actual labor context of the knowledge acquired in school, but the goal envisaged is to allow the students to see a working environment and a quality job⁷⁰. It is an opportunity for them to gain access to a labor world that is normally not open to them because of the context where they come from and the labor segmentation they are usually faced with.

Table 1 shows these models, adding also the socio-educational characteristics of the young people who go to these schools.

Table 1. Approaches to the internship and pupil profiles, for each school

	School No. 1	School No. 2	School No. 3
Type of school	Technical High School, oriented to electro mechanics, traditional technical school	Senior High School, oriented to goods and services, with specific program in food, provincial program	Senior High School, oriented to general or commercial studies, municipal program
Origin of the internship system besides the interest shown by the school	Requirement of companies in the field	Fostered by association of industries	Fostered by educational policy
% of pupils with internships or labor practices	100%	20%	20%
Integration of the curriculum into the internship	Curriculum evaluated	Is not part of the curriculum	Is not part of the curriculum
Profile of the pupils	Most of them continue with higher education, most of the parents have completed high school	Half of them continue with higher education, half of the parents have completed high school, the rest have less than that	Most of them do not continue with higher education, most of the parents have not completed high school
Main goal of the	Part of the technical and socio-professional	Complementary training in	Quality labor experience

⁶⁹ Unlike the two previous cases, in this one the internships are the school’s only initiative to “put the kids closer to the working place”.

⁷⁰ The students in the commercial option have a possibility to follow internships in an important store in the area while those in the general high school do that in the Health Center of the neighborhood.

internship	training	actual context	
Type of internship	Consolidated and integrated, as part of the technical and socio-professional training	Limited, emphasis on complementary training in real labor context	Limited, emphasis on quality labor experience

Source: Own data

3. Labor knowledge linked to the internships, from the perspective of the young

As mentioned before, 26 young graduates from the three schools belonging to the internship models just described were interviewed. In this section, the *work knowledge* perceived by the young as acquired through the internships will be examined. The similarities and differences and the different types of establishments will be pointed out.

3.1 Practice in an actual working context: technical knowledge and “knowhow”

...maybe I knew about them, but I had never “seen” them...

We have indicated that the most traditional goal of the internships was that of training “on” the jobsite or, in other words, putting into practice the knowledge acquired in school. Indeed, the meaning of **complementary training in the workplace** seems to be very strong for the graduates of the technical studies, as one could have expected (14/22).

Thus, the young people with technical backgrounds (schools 1 and 2), who during their internship work on tasks that are related to topics learned at school, feel that the acquisition of technical knowledge plays an important role and has a specific meaning in their training. From their perspective, there is integration between the learning obtained at school and that acquired at the internship.

“I saw in the practical field everything I learnt in theory at school. I was able to implement all the knowledge acquired and I saw it in essays and elsewhere. I learnt a lot: how to get along in a laboratory, the time schedules. Even the trials, these are new things that I started learning over time; maybe I knew about them but I had never seen them. I imagined them, I had seen them in a theoretical manner in the classroom.” (Emiliano, 20 years old, school No. 2).

This is especially visible in the case of school No. 1, where the technical learning obtained during the internship is seen, both by the young and the institution, as an indispensable practical complement to the training. This also explains why the internship is a curriculum activity and that all young should have the possibility to carry out.

“From a technical point of view I learnt a number of things. (...) Sure, because I learnt things that maybe were taught in school but I didn’t really pay much attention to them because they were heavy topics, or maybe those topics had too much theory and what I wanted was rather practical, and so here I saw everything that was taught to me in high school.” (Marcelo, 20 years old, school No. 1).

Two situations cropped up in which the young felt disappointed with the little chance they got from the internship to complement their technical knowledge. On the one hand, the young following technical sections were put to work in administrative jobs by the companies (school No. 2). On the other hand, graduates from schools geared at the services sector (school No. 3),

where the weight of the technical aspects is not so strong, had the expectation of putting in place their general basic skills⁷¹. Generally speaking, both situations may be linked to the fact that the interns are put to work on jobs requiring a lower qualification than the one they expected.

“When we talked to our teacher here, who had explained the internship to us, she mentioned something about cash registers. (...) Of course it was more related to accounting, we were going to work with registers and something administrative, which never happened, we were never placed in an administrative job and we were never at the cash register either, we started working as stock clerks right away, all of us, the girls too” (Roberto, 17 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

“(...) instead of giving us all the possibility of doing something in chemistry, as other kids had done, they put us to work elsewhere, which upset me a lot because I almost had no experience with that” (Johanna, 19 years old, school No. 2).

This situation is also related to the goals these schools have regarding the internships. For example, school No. 3, which is a general high school, does not have specific goals regarding the technical knowledge to be obtained during the internship. Which gives rise to a lack of specificity in the tasks carried out by the young, which is even worsened by the fact that the goal of the institution with these programs is not to reinforce or to build a “knowhow” base but to give the young the opportunity to experience a job other than the one they might get on their own.

However, over and above the fact that the task may be linked to the specific technical knowledge they had, the youth usually encounter a “knowhow” unknown to them until that time, especially one linked to computer skills, information classification, writing, etc. They discovered that they could implement this type of knowledge when solving concrete problems.

“What I actually learned was to use the computer better... although I knew how to use it, I had never worked with spreadsheets” (Luciano, 19 years old, school No. 2).

“In the field of administration I learnt quite a lot, how things are managed, especially statistics, I learned what a hospital is, to fill out a medical history, the censuses and how to manage all that, which is one of the most difficult things in hospitals” (Andrea, 21 years old, school No. 3, general high school).

3.2. The most valued knowledge: “knowhow” or socio-professional skills

...I didn't have a clue what a work environment was all about, and I think this helped me quite a bit...

Now, the **social and labor skills** are those most widely accepted by the youth as having been acquired during the internships, in a similar way for all three schools (17 youngsters).

In this sense, the youngsters agree with strong prior evidence according to which these practices provide specific knowledge regarding their “knowhow” as workers. What is really at stake here is not so much what they learnt to “do”, but the attitudes and behaviors acquired during an induction stage in an actual work environment.

Although two out of the three schools run guiding workshops (on how to write a resume, how to do a job interview, and workers' rights), it is in the framework of the mechanisms that the young see the possibility of acquiring social and relational knowledge (Stroobants, 1995) and these are essential in order to develop in the labor world.

“...what was really helpful during the internship is that they really told us how we were expected to behave on the job, they told us many things, they guided us on the job” (Roberto, 17 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

⁷¹ When the school training is oriented towards the services sector, the “technical” knowledge may be considered quite general in nature and linked to transferable skills such as computer sciences or language (Steedman, 2007).

Through this experience, the youngsters started to understand the importance of having an attitude knowledge, which is the most frequently demanded knowledge by employers in the workplaces where they expect to be hired. To be able to handle a work interview, to comply with a schedule, to solve situations that seem to be challenging, to be autonomous on the job, are, amongst others, frequent requirements made by the employers, over and beyond the concrete skills required for the tasks they are asked to do.

"...of course, although this wasn't really working because they treated us differently, it was different being an intern, besides they were all grownups so we were the only kids... but I did see what a work environment and a job with responsibility looked like" (Luciano, 19 years old, school No. 2).

Regardless of the degree of satisfaction they felt with the tasks they had to carry out, getting to know a labor environment allowed them to understand the professional codes, the values and the standards of being a *working person*. Especially for youngsters coming from low-income households, this is important to get familiar with a formal working environment (Schuetze, 2004).

"...it was really helpful as a labor experience as such, maybe because I didn't have the faintest idea of what a working environment was like, and I really think it was helpful" (Pamela, 20 years old, school No. 2).

"Besides I also learned the... how do you call that... the company environment, what the work is like, what you do in an interview... all of these things I had learnt before during the internship, I knew more or less what I was up to, what the people were like, I learnt a lot" (Leandro, 22 years old, school No. 1).

Getting closer to quality jobs, has also been valued by the young, in particular in schools numbers 2 and 3. Many of them got a first-hand view of the formal working environment. Thus, although for all of them the experience was enriching, in the particular case of these youngsters the internship allowed them to get into a labor market segment to which it would have been difficult to gain access with their own social capital. The school performed in these cases as a kind of *institutional social capital*.

"we are learning what the working environment is like... because in my family I have no one working in a factory, therefore you don't have anybody who comes home and tells you about it" (Eliana, 21 years old, school No. 2).

"For example, I had never cashed in any sum, and therefore they more or less guided me with the issue of going to the bank, what I had to do and so on" (Sebastián, 18 years old, school No. 2).

The process of getting to know the environment and understanding its rationale had the effect of mitigating the fears of the youngsters when they got out of high school and had to start walking the labor path on their own.

"Yes, if I hadn't had the experience of the internship I think any other job would been a much greater effort, as I would have feared it much more" (Sandra, 20 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

3.3. Discipline at work

...I learned what it means to be working seriously with people looking at you...

Among the socio-labor knowledge elements at stake, some of them appear new in the framework of the breakups that were mentioned in the first part. The youth of today have, before they went into the labor world, gone through two institutions undergoing deep changes, where the links have become more democratic and the socializing footprint is continuously

questioned by the juvenile cultures themselves. The workplace inside the companies has not changed in the same sense, as in spite of the new ways in which labor is being organized and the emphasis on cooperation strategies, labor discipline still has new formats. Indeed, a less emphasized top-down approach and the teamwork shaping these new organization modes do not mean that hierarchy disappears and that standards play a lesser role. Therefore, for the young person, *labor socialization* today entails facing institutionalization which is quite different from that previously known. Relationships with superiors, taking part in decisions, and respect for stringent standards, are today behavioral paths that the youth have to learn in the workplace. The testimonies show a major acknowledgment of these learnings as being new. This is even more so for the graduates from schools numbers 2 and 3, as those of school No. 1 may have undergone the technical school organizational patterns that had already allowed them to get some of these knowledge elements.

"For me it did change a lot the way in which I get along with people. I had a different vision of what a boss means" (Jonathan, 20 years old, school No. 2).

"if a superior said something to me I had to shut up and think twice, and this is also helpful because if for any reason you have a problem outside the labor environment, it is good not to bring it to the workplace" (Soledad, 22 years old, school No. 3, general high school).

At the same time, the reference to developing a sense of *responsibility* crops up frequently. Young people consider that the responsibility they have to demonstrate in the workplace is of a different nature than the one required at school. The fact that the work itself has an impact beyond oneself, unlike the failure at an examination at school, for example, puts them in a greater position of commitment vis-à-vis the task they are carrying out (Marhuenda, 2006).

"...the fact of doing something for somebody (maybe you were not used to the fact that something that had to be done well depended on you), means you have to be more responsible" (Johanna, 19 years old, school No. 2).

"...from a personal perspective it gave me a great sense of responsibility, above all. It made me more responsible, it helped me to become so" (Emiliano, 20 years old, school No. 2).

Getting in touch with experienced workers, with bosses or superiors, with working modes and paces that are regulated, with interpersonal relationships in the labor environment, the time organization, the understanding of the need to add your part to a working process where you are one of the pieces, are all discoveries for these youngsters which, ultimately, allow them to find out what the *rules of the game* in the labor world are like.

"First, as a labor experience, it was very good (...). Having never worked before, when you get in you start meeting older people who have spent many years in the company, some of them 20, or even 30 years in the company, people who have a very clear idea of things and you just get there and wonder 'well, what am I doing here', you know, 'what am I not supposed to do' and you start getting involved and that provides you with a lot of experience..." (Sergio, 25 years old, school No. 1).

Even the knowledge of the real world of a company may bring about a more strategic perspective of the interpersonal relationships at work.

"...there are many, many hidden things in our workplace... sometimes there are internal angers (...) let's say they are very delusive (...) and well, here (in my present job) it also happens... and you still have to be there (...) anyway I think I learnt that over there, because you had to know who was talking to you sincerely and who wasn't (...) when I got into this workplace I knew more or less how to handle things, so to speak, or at least, what I wasn't supposed to be doing, just in case, you know"(Luciano, 19 years old, school No. 2).

In this sense, the internship becomes a kind of **anticipation of future experiences**. Moreover, its special value is that these experiences would probably never happen to these young people were it not for the schools.

There is very little reflection among these young kids of a critical vision regarding the rules of the game at the workplace. Generally speaking, their challenges are linked to the contents of the tasks (for example that they cannot do something that bears no relationship with what they studied, or with what they had been told in advance), but not to the working conditions themselves. This is certainly to be explained by the fact that the internships examined here were essentially in formal working environments, under the supervision of the institutions; first, their tutors in the companies, and second, in some cases, the schools. Although no case of abuse has been detected in the cases under study, the question of whether the internship experience has been used by the school to reflect on companies' discipline strategies is still pending.

3.4. Personal skills: "knowing how to be" beyond the work environment

...you know how to deal with people, you're not so shy any more

Likewise, though less frequently, young people tell us that the internship allowed them to introduce certain changes in their personal lives. These have only been pointed out by the graduates of schools numbers 2 and 3, especially linked to the learning communication skills and developing higher confidence in themselves. Reference is made here to skills related to "expression" and to personality training (Marhuenda, 2006).

The young people indicate a difference between their capacity to communicate or express their ideas before and after the program. They value the greater ease it gave them in communicating with their work mates and with customers, and the opportunities they had to ask questions and "voice their fears" in an environment where they felt alienated. It is remarkable that those who voice the usefulness of this learning tool the loudest are women.

"...it helped me to form relationships with people... although I am not a shy girl, you know, the issue of communication... maybe at the age of 16 one does not know about formal communication, it is as though I did learn that... maybe to see an aspect of my personality that I didn't know about" (Eliana, 21 years old, school No. 2).

"I think that without the internship it would have been very difficult for me to start working, because I wouldn't know how to speak to people, how to do things, it would be more difficult for me to ask... the internship was all about overcoming those fears and asking" (Elisa, 20 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

Many young people come to the internship feeling they belong to a different world to that of the people with whom they have to work on a day-to-day basis. We were indeed able to verify that with the kids coming from very low income households and who live in slums or in very humble neighborhoods, such as those interviewed in school No. 3. In these cases, the mechanism gives them more confidence in themselves, driven by the access to jobs that are outside the environment to which they belong, and it provides them with *emotional* support to face new situations.

"Of course, now I feel confident... before I saw them (the customers) as above me and now I deal with them as if they were people from the street. (...) Before I was shy, I felt minuscule when a customer was there" (Roberto, 17 years old, school No. 3, commercial sector).

Sometimes the young value the internship as a discovery stepping stone over and beyond a specific job or vocation. In this sense, they recognize that the program allows them to experience another reality or to explore other possibilities compared to their previous situation.

"I also learned to see how things worked outside, because I was used to seeing everything through rose-colored glasses (...) and life is not like that" (Ariel, 18 years old, school No. 3, general high school).

"The best thing was that they opened my eyes, they gave me better judgment" (Jonathan, 20 years old, school No. 2).

3.5. Willingness: new jobs and development of a vocation

... I like to be well dressed, you know, clean, when I'm at my workplace...

The youth acknowledge that the internships develop new *determinations* in them (Nicole-Drancourt, 1994) that may be linked to working in a new labor environment or to continuing with a higher education. The definition of a working environment, or a vocation, that may be interesting makes it easier for them to project their personalities, to set goals and expectations. It gives them the possibility to build a strategy, starting from the development of a certain *professional or vocational maturity* that the mechanism sets in motion, as was seen in the first part (Forner *et al*, 1996). The situation in this sense is quite similar between graduates of the different schools.

In the case of school No. 1, vocational maturity is strongly linked to the technical training provided by the school. The impact of the internship in this sense is blurred when compared to the traces left by that lengthy technical training. The young people have quite a well-defined vocation, and they even continue with university studies along the same lines. Moreover, the willingness to work immediately after the internship is not always encouraged. Some youngsters, those who wish to go to college, and who have the family support to do so, may keep on postponing the decision to work. For example, even though they may receive an offer to remain in the job they had during the internship, they may reject that because it may be incompatible time-wise with other activities (mostly their higher education).

"It was possible for me (to remain in the company after the internship) but I had to wait until April (...) I didn't want to, so I called once but... I did call but I wasn't... I wasn't actually interested... I just wanted to know if there was an opening, because there was a job there that I liked, but afterwards I thought it over because of the time schedule involved" (María, 19 years old, school No. 1).

"I knew I was going to study at the faculty and the crews do not provide you with the time needed to study because they work in shifts." (Marcelo, 20 years old, school No. 1).

The footprint left by an internship in the beginning of the configuration of a vocational identity is more clearly seen with school No. 2. There, the vocation linked to the training in the classroom is not as strong as in school No. 1. However, for those who carry out tasks linked to the specialty studied in the classroom, the internship means getting more confidence in their capacity to work in a specific job, and it gives them the possibility to project a future career linked to that learning, although they may not be able to configure an "occupational project".

"...the internship made me feel like working in what I was studying... before that I felt a little afraid, maybe uncertain, but it is as though it gave me more confidence, telling me that I was prepared to do what I was studying" (Johanna, 19 years old, school No. 2).

Another way in which this footprint is reflected on the occupational maturity is that some young are thrilled with the tasks carried out during the internship and hence modify their future priorities. When getting to know a work environment that is interesting for them and that allows them to grow professionally, they revisit their options between working and studying once they graduate. On the other hand, the discovery of themselves in the role as workers allows them to temper the uncertainty generated by their future once they leave school. That is why many young people decide to keep on studying that specialty. The "postponement strategies" (Mauger, 1998) are then examined as a function of their transition through these other programs.

“(I started to work) because I liked the idea of working in a lab. I didn’t want to work, my idea was always to study after graduating from high school and... well, the internship came about, I liked it, they hired me after that and things just moved on that way” (Emiliano, 20 years old, school No. 2).

Finally, in school No. 3 one sees rather the discovery of a labor world and occupations that were different to those known before. The influence in the construction of an occupational identity is reflected in this manner, not in a specific job or task but in a type of formal employment, previously unknown. Many of the young people had worked in the construction business before or they had done petty jobs that were tiresome and neither stimulating nor profitable. This group in particular values the possibility of getting to know a different job, that offers more security and new possibilities regarding one’s own professional achievement. For these young people, getting closer to a quality job means getting out of the precarious jobs they usually had before.

“...it was something new (...) the job in itself was good because it wasn’t so tiresome (as construction was) and I did it during the hours spent in the company” (Diego, 21 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

“I like the company much more than the construction world. I started in the construction business and it was something different, you had to be there from 5 o’clock in the morning till 5 o’clock in the afternoon, working like a dog, carrying sand from here to there, then cement, while in the company you walked in in a nice suit, quietly, at the reception desk, with people, it’s totally different, very quiet, responding to people, but it’s easy (...) I like to be on the job, so with my suit, always clean” (Roberto, 17 years old, school No. 3, commercial section).

It is also frequent that the young kids from school No. 3 “discover” a vocation through the internship. It may also come in handy to connect them with an area in which they would then like to continue their higher education. However, graduates from this school who were able to get a college education were a minority.

“(The best thing of the internship) was to have decided what I wanted to major in, I believe... in other words to be able to define my studies” (Ariel, 18 years old, school No. 3, general high school).

“what I learnt in the little room was really helpful for continuing my studies the way I am, such as the way it is organized or having the basic knowledge needed to go to college, as I see it now” (Sonia, 21 years old, school No. 3, general high school).

Thus, the internship may be linked in different manners to the vocational and occupational maturity, but evidence allows us to assume that it has a greater impact on those who are the farthest away from a quality labor world and for whom the choices at school geared at the labor world seem to be limited.

The following table provides an overview of the knowledge acquired during the work in the internships, according to the graduates’ interview.

Table 2. Knowledge acquired at the workplace, during the internships, according to the graduates from the various schools

	School No. 1	School No. 2	School No. 3
Appraisal of what has been learnt			
Technical skills	XXX	XX	X
Social and labor skills	XXX	XXX	XXX

Personal skills		XX	XX
Experience with a formal/protected job		XX	XXX
Willingness			
To keep on working, occupational maturity		XX	X
Vocational maturity		XX	X

Source: own data

Note: we have shown the intensity for the variables in question with an 'X'

4. The internship as an access point to employment

...they saw that I had a strong willingness to work, I knew the job (...) of course, is there anything better than someone who knows the job?

The internship involves experimenting with a work situation that in turn involves, as we have seen, many socio-labor and technical learning environments, highly valued by the young people. The experience can also be made in a more pragmatic fashion. Many young people are aware that it is important when looking for a job to be able to show a prior history of having spent some time in a large and/or formal company. In these cases, from the moment the internship is offered to them, they are motivated to carry it out because of the possibility that it provides them as a "reference" for future jobs.

But over and above the reference issue, the internship sometimes becomes the access to a job for the young. And this is so because from the company strategy perspective the internship is also a possibility to evaluate these young people and to select the staff at the same time that they train them. Thus, the internship becomes an induction strategy for the company. Especially when we are thinking about large corporations, many young people are then invited to remain in the company as permanent staff. Of the group of young people interviewed, approximately half got their present employment through that stepping-stone mechanism.

The young people know the possibility of getting a job and they put their expectations in remaining as employees of the companies.

In the cases where the young people are hired by the companies at the end of the internship program, the knowledge they have acquired has a dual advantage. On the one hand, because it is of a general nature it can be used anywhere; and on the other, when the issue at stake is the interpersonal relationships in a specific environment, it is particularly relevant as it offers these young people some guidelines to evolve in that environment⁷².

The pathways of the graduates are very insightful regarding the impact of the internships on the quality of the jobs they will get later. In spite of the differences pointed out at the beginning regarding the present occupational insertion of the young of each of these schools, some data are

⁷² Obviously, not all the young having expectations to be hired afterwards manage to do so. Many are disappointed because they consider it was the best labor opportunity they could have had after finishing their high school.

surprising regarding the quality of their jobs. In most cases, the young people coming from these three schools have formal jobs, and are on a payroll, with open-ended contracts.

Table 3. Labor benefits for the graduates in their present jobs

	Retirement and other benefits		No benefits
	Job obtained through the internship	Job not obtained through the internship	
School No. 1	3	3	2
School No. 2	3	4	0
School No. 3	3	4	2
Total	9	11	4

Source: Survey “Trayectorias”

This is an important piece of information because on the labor market of the Buenos Aires suburbs the first labor insertions of the young are usually precarious. Are the internships one of the reasons for which these young people gained greater quality jobs than they could have expected? We may indeed respond affirmatively. On the one hand, because for many of them it is their first job, to which they had access through the internship itself. Moreover, the data indicate that those who had worked before the internship have better quality jobs today. The influence of the internship is more visible in the case of school No. 3, where half the young people interviewed did work before starting their internships, though in low quality jobs. As can be seen from table 3, this has changed drastically.

What is the relative importance of the internship, the training and the diploma granted by the high school in the quality jobs obtained by most of the young people interviewed? The situation for each group is very different. School No. 1 has a historic link with the most important company with which it has signed an internship agreement. The young people know that by the sheer fact of being graduates of that school they have the possibility of getting a job there. In this case, the internship is a selection as well as an induction in the company, but it is considered that the young person in question is ready to graduate from the school. In the cases of schools numbers 2 and 3, the internship seems to be a condition improvement facilitator, as has been shown. In this sense we may say that the value of the internship in terms of equal opportunities is greater for these groups. This result has already been verified in other studies: the internship seems to have a greater net positive impact when the social-educational profiles of the young are low at the time they get into the internships (Forner *et al*, 1996).

However, regarding other labor indicators, the young graduates seem to be giving signals that the socio-economic profiles and the technical training in general are the most important aspects allowing us to understand the differences in opportunities between the groups of young. Thus, although at the task qualification level an improvement has been observed towards a greater skill level in all of the cases, it doesn’t happen in the same fashion for all three groups. The young people of school No. 1 are those who have the most technical jobs while at the other end, those graduated from school No. 3 are concentrated around non-skilled and jobs and those consisting of operational tasks. These differences are also reflected in their salaries and the sizes of the companies to which they gain access.

The young kids from school No. 1 used to work, at the time of the interview, essentially in companies with 40 employees or more and their average wages represented more than twice that of the minimum wage. Those who graduated from school No. 2 did also work in companies of more than 40 employees but, unlike the previous group, most of them were working as

unskilled and non-technical labor. Their average salaries were 23% below those of the previous group. Finally, the young people from school No. 3 used to work for smaller companies than the two previous groups. Their average salaries were 65% below those of the first group and more than half of them had been unemployed for a while. As can be seen, the differences in starting points are also reflected in their present labor condition, over and beyond the “equity” effect provided by the internships, among others.

Table 4. “Bridge to employment” effect of the internships, according to the graduates of the various schools

	School No. 1	School No. 2	School No. 3
Bridge to the job			
Direct access to a job	XXX	X	X
Quality improvement when compared to previous jobs	XX	XX	XX
Qualification improvement when compared to previous jobs	XXX	XX	X

Source: Own data

Note: we have marked the intensity of the variables in question with an X

5. Final comments

Given that the traditional labor socialization processes have been broken, the practical work carried out in actual labor contexts have acquired new meanings. The labor market appraises transferable and socio-professional knowledge and skills that the young people do not manage to get during their high school cycle or their initial insertion trajectories, which are very often fragmented.

Do the internships allow the young to get closer to the new knowledge needed for work? Or to face a labor world that is both complex and unequal? Do they allow them to improve their labor and vocational opportunities after the internship? Given the limits imposed by the exploratory nature of this volume, we have tried hereafter to show the answers to these questions.

The young people interviewed, who generally speaking have only had access to precarious labor opportunities or who have never worked, value the fact of having a prior experience, granted with a certain degree of control, as a positive opportunity to get acquainted with the rules of the game of the labor world, with complex interpersonal relationships, and the acknowledgement of what is expected from them, not only in terms of specific knowledge and in problem-solving but also in terms of attitudes.

Although the socio-professional skills have been mentioned by all of the young people, there are other kinds of skills that crop up and that point at some differences between the graduates from the various schools. For example, among the graduates of school No. 1, which introduces an integrated internship model, the technical quality and the possibility to put in practice what they have learnt at school seems to be a very strong element. Conversely, some of the students of the other two schools emphasize the personal skills learnt during the internships.

The graduates of the three schools have indicated that they feel they are better prepared to face the labor world after this tutored labor experience; the internship had an impact on what they

wanted. However, findings also vary from one school to the next. The youth of school No. 1, the integrated model, do not seem to have perceived the internship as a discovery of their vocation or as an access point to a labor world to which they would not have entered otherwise. It rather works as a confirmation of a vocation they had before. Conversely, for the youth of school No. 2, where the internship is a limited model, a complement of their training, the experience had a strong influence on their vocational maturity and a considerable influence on the decision to keep on working when the opportunity came up. This is so not only because they valued that opportunity but also because they thought they had a small probability of finding another job of the same quality. As for the young people from the school where the internship is valued as an opportunity to get experience in a formal job, it is precisely this aspect they underscored: they gained access to a segment of the labor market to which it would have been difficult to enter on the basis of their own social capital alone.

The impact of internships on the subsequent pathways also shows how a different starting point leads to a different finish line. An important proportion of the youth get a job through the internship, but the proportion increases with the integrated model of school No. 1. The quality of the jobs they get after the internship is essentially good. However, when compared to the qualification level of the tasks they carry out in their present jobs, these mechanisms lead to a higher qualification job only for those coming from school No. 1, and to lesser extent, to those from school No. 2. As could have been expected, the internship does not replace the soundness of a high school technical training process.

In short, this paper has only explored the subjective and objective potential of the internships as tools to improve the opportunities of the young. Besides the traditional values, some new ones have cropped up and they have a positive impact on their pathways. Stemming from these analyses, new questions, much deeper questions, come up. Among them we find, on the one hand, the interest in developing studies with a more ambitious follow up period, which might confirm the findings and make them more complex, also as a function of their usefulness to make more comprehensive decisions. On the other hand, we may wonder how complex it becomes to implement internships and to manage such a mechanism at the level of the full educational system, as a bridge between education and labor. For the time being, the strong impact on the young coming from different training and social profiles seems to be a good starting point to promote the introduction of this mechanism with more emphasis on the research agenda on education and labor and also on the public policies of secondary education.

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