

Extended abstract

*Trajectories and Aspirations
of Rural Young People on Territories
in Transformation: A Case
in Rural Areas in Cayambe, Ecuador*



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Highlights:

1. There is no single, monolithic group of rural youth, but rather a diverse variety.
2. The trajectories and aspirations of young people are related with the territorial characteristics.
3. Young people experience the transformation of their territories as barriers and opportunities for their life projects.
4. Young people aspire to have higher education, develop economic ventures and stay connected to their communities.
5. There are the beginnings of change in rural gender systems due to the aspirations and strategies of young people.

Resumen: This study comprises an analysis of the trajectories and aspirations of rural young people of Cayambe Canton, Pichincha Province in Ecuador, and their interrelations with the territory where they live, with an emphasis on issues relating to education, work, and family. The methodological approach combines secondary statistical data with in-depth interviews with rural young people of both sexes. The results reveal a diversity of experiences, showing the importance of territorial context in youth transitions, the relevance of support programs and public policies but also the role of their families, and aspirations and strategies focused on learning, economic ventures, and the beginnings of change in gender systems. It is concluded that rural young people experience the transformation of their territories as barriers and opportunities for their life projects and their feelings of connectedness with their communities and desires to contribute to them.

Palabras clave: Youth, rurality, transitions, economic inclusion.

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1. Introduction and justification

In Latin America and in Ecuador, rural young people make up a significant proportion of the population; yet both youth research and policies addressing young people tend to carry an urban bias.

Rural societies are experiencing major transformations linked to ongoing processes in areas such as patterns of urbanization, urban-rural interactions, and the diversification of employment markets. In this context, rural young people face a wide range of barriers and little research has been conducted into their aspirations or the interactions between their trajectories and the characteristics of their territories.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

The objective is to describe and analyze the trajectories and aspirations of rural young people of Cayambe Canton in Ecuador, and their interrelations with the territories where they live their lives, with an emphasis on issues relating to education, work, and family.

The methodological approach combines the use of secondary statistical data with 16 in-depth interviews in rural areas of Cayambe Canton, Pichincha Province.

3. Results

While rural areas may have previously been categorized as relatively homogeneous, with agriculture as the main activity and each generation tending to replicate the positions and activities of their forebears, this model no longer holds true. People who inhabit these areas are experiencing ongoing transformations in a number of areas, and in this framework, rural young people take diverse pathways or trajectories on their way towards the adult world.

Although access to higher education is low in rural zones, notably lower than in more urban areas, it occupies a leading role for rural young people as the para-

mount tool for social mobility, albeit not an easy one to achieve. Most stated that their standardized admission test scores were not high enough for the course they wanted to study or their first-choice university, with many forced to postpone the continuation of their education or enter a higher education program that was not their preferred option.

In labor issues, young people's experiences are marked by a range of different activities, low wages, and long work days. The activities in which they engage are linked to the dynamics of the territory. Those who wish to work in a field other than agriculture, horticulture, or livestock and who do not possess the resources necessary to launch such a venture need to seek opportunities in the city or, in the majority of cases, feel obliged to work in areas that are not linked to their studies or what they personally desired. They therefore envisage a future of independent ventures rather than working for a set wage.

Young people's trajectories feature geographical mobility, both for specific and bounded periods and in the long term, for work or education. Young people show significant desires to maintain links with their home territory, living there or returning after completing education and/or work elsewhere, to contribute to their communities.

Community, traditions, nature, peace, and security are values that mobilize them and figure in their identity and their sense of belonging. They do not see migration as uprooting. This is linked to their territory's closeness and connectedness with urban areas, providing them with an opportunity to move in search of work or education but still be able to return to their community.

Meanwhile, although rural women have more children and have their first child younger than their urban peers, significant changes are observed in life plans amongst rural communities, where many young women do not see family life and childcare as an exclusive or priority goal compared to other dreams linked to education or work.

The birth of a child has differentiated effects amongst fathers and mothers. Mothers find themselves pressed to set aside a period of time for intensive dedication to care tasks, which can be extended for a second child, leading to a failure to completed education courses and distancing them from paid activities. Meanwhile, new fathers often abandon their education to enter the job market, which can in turn lead to domestic migration processes.

Gender discrimination practices do exist, but today's young women face different challenges to their mothers and grandmothers. Interviewees report that violence and mistreatment used to be more widespread and tolerated than they are now, and

than they desire for younger generations; childcare is thus now more equitable in this sense, so a cultural change is in progress.

Furthermore, family life remains a factor of major relevance, albeit a double-edged one. Family can constitute an essential source of support and aid, as generally occurs (help with expenses, day-to-day assistance, inspiration, and advice), but it can also form a barrier for the achievement of young people's life goals (parental opposition to personal projects, need to observe home curfew times, illness or need to care for a member of the family, motherhood and the consequent need to engage in childcare).

Finally, several of the young people interviewed belong to a range of groups and associations, or attend local organization meetings, but their older peers pay little attention to their input, and remain in charge of decision making. Interviewees report that older people find it hard to accept the innovative ideas that young people put forward.

Young people's trajectories show that their pathways to economic inclusion are related to what their families have passed on to them, be it a traditional family trade, material capital (land, livestock, machinery, money), or intangible assets (knowledge, personal networks, practices and attitudes to life). Many also value what they have received from their communities.

This comes as part of a specific territory and within the framework of public and private investment and support structures. Public policies in areas such as road connectivity, education and health service coverage, access to specific programs supporting areas such as production, entrepreneurship, or sport, are of major relevance in understanding the situation in which young people live.

4. Discussion

Rural young people in Cayambe Canton of Ecuador have diverse aspirations and trajectories, configured through a wide range of experiences in family life, education, work, and territorial mobility.

Rural young people build their life plans through decisions influenced by their own experiences and desires, their family environment, and the opportunities that their territorial context affords them, confirming the hypotheses of Hardgrove *et al.* (2014), Taylor (2010), Elder *et al.* (2003), Diewald (2008), and Stettensen & Gannon (2005). Territorial aspects such as access to services and equipment can also contribute to more

favorable economic outlooks (Urrutia & Trivelli, 2018; IFAD, 2019). Analysis of the stories reported by Ecuador's rural young people contributes to thinking on the interaction between these factors and the biographies of young people as a complex process, in light of the diversity of trajectories and aspirations.

Furthermore, although they face a number of shared barriers, the strategies that they use in their life plans are also diverse, with significant roles played by family life, personal determination, and support programs and public policies offered by private bodies of cooperation organizations, each addressing its own geographic area. Spaces for recognition and decision making are also relevant.

5. Conclusions

This article has investigated young people's trajectories in four dimensions (education, work, family life, and geography), confirming that alongside culture and social institutions, territory and its characteristics can influence their lives.

Rural young people's aspirations, the barriers they face, and the strategies they use in their trajectories tend to be ignored by both the social sciences and public institutional structures. Understanding them in light of their interrelation with individual, family, and territorial issues, as well as the role of public policies and other initiatives at each key transition over the course of these people's lives, allows courses of action to be outlined that can favor their social and economic inclusion both today and in the future.

6. Next steps

People's social and political participation plays a key role in both territorial development processes and social transformation processes. This project has touched on these complex topics, underscoring the need for recognition and decision-making spaces that involve young people.

This is a relevant field of research that should be addressed further in the future, building on the perspective that young people can be agents of change for their territories and for society as a whole. What social and political participation forums involve rural young people? What motivations guide them? How are their trajectories influenced by this participation? These are questions that must be answered, and a field where further research is important.