

# Chapter 9

## Young People's Rural Quality of Life in the Colombian Andes: A Qualitative Study Using Triangulation

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### 9.1 Invisibilization of Young People Living in Rural Areas

This section aims at approaching the problems resulting from the young people's invisibilization or negative visibilization in the rural context in the high Colombian Andean mountains<sup>1</sup>. This is a situation that affects the quality of their lives, not only before any wrong actions by the State, resulting from an approach in which the youngsters are considered as objects of protective actions aiming at social welfare, but before the fact that said actions and their results can contribute to the construction of their perceptions about themselves. This section also refers to how these actions are supposed to develop in order to reach what these youngsters consider a good standard of rural life for themselves, for their families, their community and for the rural environment where they live.

Effective the validity of its political Constitution of 1991, Colombia has been recognized as a social juridical state in the form of a unitarian, democratic, participative and pluralistic state, on the basis of respect for human dignity, the solidarity among its people and the prevalence of general interest, the Colombian Andean high-mountain young peoples; that is to say, those belonging to the farming economy, among others, are not consulted about their perception about the quality of life and the way how the rural dynamics of their environment contributes or obstacles the obtaining of what they consider a good rural life or a good rural quality of life. These predicaments oblige, from one perspective, to approach the comprehension

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<sup>1</sup> The Colombian Rural Andean Zone is considered as that one consisting of the high-mountains and traditional-farming production sectors located in the Colombian Andean mass of mountains. The term high-mountain refers to those sectors over 2,700 m above sea level, and the traditional farming production to that area derived from the passive and inadequate adoption of the agrarian model of the Green Revolution, which is very different from the industrialized commercial production resulting from the active adoption of this method.

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consisting of how these young peoples construct, along with their daily activities, their meanings about the “rural quality of life”. From another other perspective, they refer to the judgment about the practical importance of qualitative research methods and the methodological triangulation in order to approach the quality of life of the rural young peoples in the study context, the main reason for this reflection.

In the Latin American sphere, young peoples living in rural areas are seldom taken as valid social actors to be consulted by the planners, decision makers and administrators in rural development programs that, finally, aim at improving their social welfare conditions. This situation is different in the various bands of young people living in rural areas who are provided with better attention (Becerra 2001; Kessler 2005). It is a fact that reflects a scarce attainment of human rights represented fundamentally in a few or invalid voice rights in making family and community decisions and in controlling the resources (Durstun 2002). The origin of this lack of recognition could be explained by the fact that most part of literature about the history of childhood and young people, that has been written from the perspective of social sciences, has been made from a Western reality, which entails a certain ethnocentric bias with reference to the conceptualization of young people and obviously of rural young people and of the rural quality of life. Accordingly, both the studies on indigenous peoples and those on farming and urban families, “tended to see their study subjects as indigenous, farmers, settlers, men, women, capitalists, workers, but not as children and less, as young peoples” (Feixa and González 2006, p. 177).

Nevertheless, socio-cultural research studies are identified where, without explicating a generational posture, the consideration of young peoples who move from apathy to protest and social complaint remains implicit in their results and recommendations. This is the case of the “Andes Farmers” authored by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1961) where he defines how the apathy *ethos* generated by traumatic experiences in the Andean rural community during the Conquest, the Colony and the Republic, is a factor that mentally and socially impoverishes the community members. Such ethos is kept by means of the formative training of adolescents within the adults’ apathy molds, a situation which slowly becomes modified due to “progressive rationalism” as a consequence from modernization. The Andean rural community acquires, effective that time, an adequate sense of social injustice “which generates a resignation transition to dissatisfaction and gives birth to social conflicts in Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, Argentina and Guatemala, among others (Fals Borda 1961, p. 303).

From 1985, with the proclamation of the International Young people Year by the United Nations, it has been possible to identify socio-cultural studies that evidence how the formative training detected by Fals Borda characterizes the prevalence of a training which lacks the impulse to an effective participation of the rural young people in the decisions affecting their lives and their quality of life. This scarce participation is evidenced in the administrative and academic functions of rural educational institutions, in the lack of spaces to share general and specific information about themselves and their rural environment, and in the “minimal socio-community link with other entities working on rural juvenile aspects” (Quiroga 2002, pp. 98–108). Besides, the social conflicts identified by Fals Borda are also present

in the modernization processes of countries such as Chile, thus accompanying a juvenile identity configuration in the rural sector, which ranges from a weak ascription tensed by the vital cycle, goes through a generational identity and arrives, at the end of the decade of the 80s, at “the foundation of juvenile cultures” (González 2004, pp. 643–653).

Research studies on young people carried out in Latin America from 2000, with reference to factors influencing social welfare, agree in their findings and main conclusions: (1) coexisting sectorial policies aiming at young people<sup>2</sup> and specifically young people-oriented policies, which are dislocated and redundant; (2) lack of specific programs to reduce the deficit in service coverage and inequities concerning the gender and ethnic conditions of belonging to rural zones; (3) the presence of the paradox that considers the youngsters as the central actors of development, at the same time that the rural young people becomes invisibilized (Bango 2000, pp. 19–21; Hopenhayn et al. 2004, p. 36; Kessler 2005, p. 5). These studies<sup>3</sup> identify approaches on young people where its beginning is assumed, from a natural condition, in the physiological puberty, and ends, from the perspective of a psychological condition, when there is maturity to assume adult responsibilities and when society recognizes that adult status, which evidences its perception as “a cultural universal, a natural phase of human development which would be found in all societies and historical moments” (Feixa and González 2006, p. 172).

In the Colombian sphere it is also possible to evidence the traditional trend to visibilize the urban zone in the development policies much more than the rural zone. This is due to the fact that social welfare is considered inferior, among other reasons, because the dispersed rural area presents bigger deficiencies in domestic infrastructure, the families are large and undergo a lot of lacks; besides, boys, girls and young peoples, who “are more than 50% of the population and the most vulnerable elements of the society (...) when reproducing their parents' situation”, little by little revert this situation on those who work and decrease their economic independence (Bonilla et al. 2004, p. 97).

On the other hand, “Young people” is identified as a social category that emerges in the research studies carried out in the Colombian urban context no matter the reiterated mentioning of the “urban-rural” category in most research studies about

<sup>2</sup> The Sectorial Policies with an intentionality towards young people are assumed in this paper as those formulated from 1950 in the Latin American countries, which without explicating their goals towards this population sector, display a clear intention, by the State, to satisfy what its agents consider young people needs or to solve societal problems which have been considered as related to the young people action.

<sup>3</sup> The results from these research studies can be consulted in the following texts: “Young people Policies in Latin America: evaluation and reformulation” (Bango 2000), with the bases for the formulation of these policies in the context of regional challenges and opportunities at the beginning of the XXI century; “Young people in Latin America. Trends and urgencies” (Hopenhayn et al. 2004) with a diagnosis of the Young people situation through the review of young people policies in Latin America, taking as a reference the approaches on rights and integral citizenship, and in “State of the art of research on rural young people in Latin America” (Kessler 2005), where the approaches, themes and conclusions from the research studies carried out in Latin America are described.

any topic on young people. This category centers around the urban matter, being this a fact that has been described not only as a verification of the localities referred to in the texts but also as a set of juvenile existential conditions in the cities. The rural dimension, mentioned in the research studies, centers around the scarcity of opportunities for academic and labor training for the young peoples living in the countryside, which makes them prone to join armed groups or to devote themselves to illegal activities. The research studies investigate, first, about the link of the rural young people with the guerrilla, with paramilitaries or with activities related to illegal crops, and about the impact of such activities on their biographies. Second, they investigate about the flows and connections between the rural and urban spheres which express themselves, for example, “through the appropriation that these young peoples make rural practices, meanings and objects taken from the urban world” (Escobar et al. 2004, p. 191).

In the course of the last forty years there has been an orientation onto different conceptions about young people. As a matter of fact, from the 1980s to the year 2000, “young people” has been perceived as a homogeneous reality; the juvenile period has been defined by its “adult” referent and by its transitory state; youngsters have been considered a problem or “risk that must be corrected”, whose socialization agents are the family, the school and the public institutions. The State has been conceived as the protector for which the young peoples are the receptors of social assistance and, of course, as the object of undifferentiated sectorial policies which tend to, as it has been explicitated, the betterment of the quality of life (Sarmiento 2004). Effective the year 2000, “young people” has been conceived as a new stage of life endowed with enough and proper elements that make it autonomous. The juvenile period loses its centrality from the “adult” statute before the complexity and heterogeneity of the juvenile reality; the young people is seen as a “strategic factor for development” and as a potentiality that has to be promoted. Their socialization agents are the market, the mass media, the new technologies and their own spaces; the State is conceived as a State that agrees with civil society and with young peoples in their quality of subjects of rights, in the process of constructing young people policies which promote and stimulate their integral training aiming at their empowerment, conditions which “stay just on the books” (Sarmiento 2004, pp. 128–134).

In general, it is possible to state that the results from research studies that evaluate the decisions and actions of the State towards the “young people” in Colombia express the urgent need to modify, not only what is stated in the books but in the reality. These studies express the urgent need to modify those stereotypes and stigmatizations that identify the young peoples belonging to urban popular, marginalized and rural sectors of the high Andean mountain as passive, helpless and apathetic to social reflection, and which consider them as related to problems, predisposed to delinquency and sluggishness, lacking judgment and autonomy and as being in permanent risk which can be corrected (Serrano et al. 2002, p. 76; Escobar et al. 2004, pp. 219, 227). This need implies the task of visibilizing positively, among others, the young peoples belonging to high-mountain sectors in the Colombian Andean zone.

Rural young people has been visibilized from the year 2000 in the State actions and decisions, in aspects which do not take into account their active and effective participation even though they affect the young peoples' lives. They are actions resulting from sectorial policies with an intentionality towards young people and associated to the mandatory military service, the creation of the figure of farmer-soldier, the offering of rewards for denouncing the presence of "sectors out of the law" in the rural zone, the manual eradication of illegal crops in natural parks with all deriving consequences, and their link, free or forced, to migration, to the guerrilla, to paramilitarism or to drug dealing.

In the last ten years, rural young peoples visibilize themselves in the "false positives"<sup>4</sup>, as they have been called by the mass media, which are simply the execution of rural young peoples, farmers and aborigines by members of the police force or the army and by the urban popular sectors. These young peoples are presented to the mass media as "guerrilleros killed in action" or as "important achievements of the police force or army", in the course, mainly, of the so-called policy of democratic security. Its goal is to "obtain illegal results without delegitimizing the institutional actor; thus, violating the war rules by making use of a fiction that will allow to legitimize crime as a response to other aggressive violence, that is, as "legitimate defense" (CINEP 2013, p. 7).

## 9.2 The Research Context

The geographical space identified as the Colombian Andean high mountains is part of what has been called the "Andean Mass"; one of the nine continental spaces<sup>5</sup> of the territorial mosaic of South America, constituted by the longest mountain chain in the world, with 7500 km which go from the Antarctic continent to the Caribbean space, with a width of 320 km. Its highest peak is in Aconcagua, which reaches

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP), one of the most important research centers in Colombia, between August 14, 2006 and June 16, 2007, the so-called "false positives" happened in 22 states of the 32 which form the country. Meta was the most affected state: "From this part of the country we knew about 24 cases with 39 victims, authored by troops belonging to the 12 Mobile Brigade, 21 Vargas Battalion, 4 Mobile Brigade and José Joaquín París Battalion of the National Army (CINEP 2007, p. 1). Recently, Todd Howland, agent of the High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights of the United Nations in Bogota stated that "We did not receive information about this type of violation in 2012, but the Public Prosecutor's Office has information about almost 5,000 victims of this phenomenon; there are antecedents of several years and there are very few sentences at present. Then, it is important that Colombia do more with reference to this problem of false positives" (CINEP 2013, p. 7).

<sup>5</sup> The Continental Spaces are big regions with arcifinious or natural limits that are shared by various countries. They are characterized by being different and stable, not only with reference to their physical, topographic, ecological and landscape configurations, but also with reference to the idiosyncrasy of every human group inhabiting the region. The continental spaces in South America are as follows: Amazonia, Orinoquia, Marabina Basin, Andean Mass, Caribbean Space, Pacific Space, Brazilian Massif, Chaco-Pampa and Patagonia Cone (Mendoza 2000, p. 40).

6950 m above sea level and hosts old ethnic archetypes which yield a vast cultural variety (Mendoza 2000, p. 44). The Andean Mass encompasses three different physiographic zones: a humid zone that goes from the Mérida Cordillera in Venezuela to the northern part of Peru; a semi-arid zone that includes the Central Andes of Peru and Bolivia, and a plateau zone that extends from the southern part of Peru, the northwestern and southern regions of Bolivia, the northern part of Chile and to the northwestern region of Argentina. The most important productive sector with reference to employment, income and food supply is agriculture with the predominance of potato crops, along with cereals, grains, vegetables and flowers combined with dairy cattle, sheep, minor animals, whose exploitation varies from country to country (Llambí 2002).

The mosaic of continental spaces contributes, in a natural way, to the first information of territorial zoning in Colombia, constituted by six of the nine continental spaces in South America<sup>6</sup>, where we find the Colombian Andean Mass, corresponding to the northern and terminal parts of the Andes Cordillera. It goes from the Andean Pacific in the west, to Orinoquia in the east, and it occupies 323,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which are equivalent to 28.3% of the continental territory (Mendoza 2000, p. 44). The mountain and the high mountains, with the traditional farmers' production and with the major ethnic variety in Colombia, are the fundamental landscape.

This research develops in the context constituted by the farmers' communities of the Cundiboyacense High Plateau, which consists of two of the 32 states in which Colombia is divided territorially: Cundinamarca, with a surface of 24,210 km<sup>2</sup>, which stands for 2.12% of the national territory, with 15 provinces and 115 municipalities (Republic of Colombia 2011b), and Boyacá, with 23,189 km<sup>2</sup> equivalent to 2.03% of the national territory, with 12 provinces and 123 municipalities (Republic of Colombia 2011a). The Cundiboyacense High Plateau, a territory that integrates the states synthetically described, is located in the Oriental Cordillera, in the high zones of the Andean system. It consists of mountain ecosystems and páramo regions which reach 3600 m above sea level, inhabited by a population descendent from the Cundiboyacense Chibcha culture, one of the most important ethnic groups in the country.

The socio-cultural scenario of the research study, where the Field Work is also done, is the potato-producing sub-region of the Cundiboyacense Plateau, characterized by a farming culture resulting from the influence and projection of the culture and mentality of the Chibcha ethnic group<sup>7</sup>, where the man is narrowly attached to the surrounding environment from which he extracts his vital forces. The sun, the moon, the lakes, the mountains, rocks and physical phenomena for him "were bound to the spirits, a reason why they were considered their main deities" (Ocampo 1983, p. 29), which stimulate the care of nature. Paradoxically, the precepts inherited

<sup>6</sup> The Colombian continental spaces are as follows: Amazonia, Orinoquia, Marabina Basin, Andean Mass, Caribbean Space and Pacific Space (Mendoza 2000, p. 42).

<sup>7</sup> The Chibcha culture refers to the peoples existing in the Nueva Granada in the XVI century, at the arrival of Spaniards. The most important of those peoples were Chibcha-Carib and Chibcha; the latter settling what it is today Cundinamarca, Boyacá, Western Atrato, Cauca and Central-Oriental Nariño. The predominant language was the one distinguished by Spaniards as the Muisca Language or Mosca, with as many dialects as linguistic families (Ariza 1992, p. 75).

from the Green Revolution, predominate in the present agricultural exploitations, they promote the use of agricultural toxins, machinery and capital to ensure a high economic performance, without any environmental consideration and opposite to ancestral technology.

The present importance of the potato-growing sub-region lies in being not only the territory where the water flows furnishing the Bogota aqueduct and where other cities of the country are born, in the ample and varied farming, coal and hand-made production, but also in being the most important agricultural region of the country concerning potato crops. In effect, this Cundiboyacense High Plateau sub-region counts on more than 99,500 hectares cultivated which produce about 1,800,000 tons of potatoes— about 18 tons per hectare—out of a tally of 134,640 hectares cultivated in Colombia, which yield 2,833,795 tons. This means that 74% of the Cundiboyacense High Plateau is cultivated and produces about 73% of the total production in the country (Fedepapa 2010, pp. 10–13). It is important to highlight that from the 90,000 families linked to direct exploitation, about 70,000 are located in this sub-region, thus generating approximately 11 out of the 15 million wages a year; besides, it becomes the activity that most uses the terrestrial transportation services, with more than 2 million t a year. This is a cipher which increases with the mobilization of the required supplies (Fedepapa 2010, p. 9).

This sub-region characterizes by its difficult access for the information and communication technologies (TIC) due to the topographic and economic conditions already described. Its centers are among those defined by the Central Administration as of difficult access because, among others, “the access to telecommunications services is still deficient in those geographically distant rural places (National Planning Department 2009, p. 5).

The socio-cultural phenomenon, the comprehension object in the research study, consists of the young peoples, their families and physical spaces—farming and mining production units, governmental and communal educational and institutional facilities –, and their actions and interactions, among themselves and with the other social actors and with the rural space where they are located. The findings of this research study allow one to approach this reflection on the perception that these rural young peoples immersed in the potato-growing sub-region of the Colombian Andean high mountains have on the Rural Quality of Life. They also state the importance of the qualitative methodology approach to studies on the rural quality of life in the Colombian Andean high mountains.

### 9.3 Conceptual References that Support the Study

#### 9.3.1 *Rural Quality of Life: From Social to Psychosocial Welfare*

The traditional concept of quality of life, initially assumed as an expression by the people in their daily life, refers to observable situations of reality recognized by people as highly positive, which strengthens itself from the 70s by the influence of

great scientific debates<sup>8</sup> happening in North America and in Western Europe. These debates are added to the positive recognition of these situations of reality, the idea of value or collective, agglutinant and widely shared aspirations of social change with the perspective of a better situation.

As a matter of fact, according to Ferrán Casas, the social challenge consisting of obtaining better life conditions becomes the condition of being an objective and a process with concrete developments according to the sphere of actuation where it is adopted, but in which each sphere looks for forms of conciliation with previous developments, be they scientific, political or technical. Thus, the meaning of “quality” is noticeably different depending upon the sphere from where it is approached. For example, from the political and professional perspective, quality, assumed as an observable quality of the services rendered, relates to satisfaction measurements by the users and, from Organizational Psychology, Total Quality is a notion that includes the objective quality of services or products, related to the satisfaction by all users (Casas 1999).

Now, from the psychosocial perspective, the notion of “quality” contains a sense of “tendency towards”, more than a “concrete objective”. It refers to a utopian tendency, unreachable in its last consequences as it shows a concrete route to a last blurry target or goal. The achievement of happiness and satisfaction with life or with specific spheres of life, for example, seems to correspond to respectable aspirations and to values consensuable from moral rationality (psychosocial rationality, according to Weber), which opens the door to a critical psychosocial utopia, oriented by a psychosocial man model (Fernandez 1990, quoted by Casas 1999).

The quality of life, seen as an observable reality by the people or by the communities, has meanings that differ from the quality of life seen from the macro-social perspective. As an observable reality, it is given various meanings with reference to how to get many quality products, to live surrounded by a quality environment, to appreciate that there is quality in the various spheres of people’s life and how to be able to satisfy one’s own expectations of comfort or well-being (Blanco 1985; Casas 1989, 1996). From a macro-social perspective, the quality of life is understood as strongly pervaded with psycho-social components and, in this sense, it is a function both of the material environment (social well-being) and of the psycho-social environment (psychological well-being), although some authors recognize it with reference to other components (Casas 1999). These two concepts about the quality of life, such as social well-being and psychosocial well-being, have implications on the meaning of social and psychological well-being.

Social well-being corresponds to what in Anglo-Saxon literature is approached from its roots as well-fare, that is, how to go or journey along a good way; a positive

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<sup>8</sup> The Rome Circle or Rome Club promotes in Europe the most specific philosophical-ideological debate about human quality through Peccei (1976), who defines the quintessential objective of humankind as “to perfect the quality of the human person”; thus approximating the idea of “quality” to the capacity of the population and to human renovation, presented as collective challenges or aspirations. For Peccei, the divulgation of the information concerning the improvement of life conditions on Earth is one of the most essential topics, thus proposing a periodical publication to be entitled “Information to the citizens of the world” (Casas, 1999).



connotation related to external situations which are observable by the people. In this sense, "it is not a matter of subjective states of consciousness, but of conditions and objective circumstances" (Moix 1986, p. 23). It refers to the psycho-social order to promote the satisfaction of shared individual needs as well as pluri-personal needs (Casas 1999).

Psychological well-being corresponds, according to its English root, "well-being", to be or to feel fine. This is a positive connotation related to subjective states of consciousness, which indicate its psychological or psycho-social dimension and characterizes because: (a) it is based upon the individuals' own experiences and on their perceptions and evaluations of those experiences, (b) its physical and material context may influence their psychological well-being, but it is not always seen as an inherent and necessary part of well-being itself, (c) it includes positive measurements, not only negative ones or the lack of negative aspects and, (d) it includes some type of global evaluation about the person's whole life, commonly referred to as *vital satisfaction* (Casas 1999).

Recently the term "well-becoming" has been introduced in the Anglo-Saxon literature to emphasize the objectives and expectations to be achieved in the course of a process (Casas 1999).

A synthesis of conceptualizations about the quality of life constructed by North American and European researchers allows identifying their considerations as a joint function of the material and the psycho-social environments, as defined by Casas (1999), as the only proposal that makes it possible to approach reality in all its amplitude and complexity. It allows one to recognize people who are "objects of study" as "subjects" of a reality about which they also have valid knowledge which; at the same time, it allows them "to engage themselves in some social and political dynamics that want to be democratic, participative and promoters of a profound respect for human rights".

Nowadays, among the Latin American countries, Argentina sets the trend in the approach of research studies on the quality of life. The well-known researcher Graciela Tonon in her publication entitled *To investigate the quality of life in Argentina*, makes an emphasis on the possibility of a new theoretical look to the meaning of these studies. As a matter of fact, they are research studies that are approached from the potentialities, more than from the lacks and from the community anchoring, of the psycho-social type, that include the analysis of the socio-political context. Such studies start from the consideration of the material environment along with the social one, thus considering the person traditionally called "object" as "subject", as the protagonist of the acting. Accordingly, the new theoretical look on quality of life suggests a social and political reality based on the respect for human rights which generates the need to work in an integrated way (Tonon 2008). Likewise, it becomes a privileged look which, when trying to integrate the macro and micro dimensions, attempts to have the protagonists' visions be taken into account at the moment of making decisions about public policies, when becoming innovating information with reference to the traditional measurements of social well-being.

Specifically and with reference to *The studies on quality of life and the perspectives of positive psychology*, Tonon coincides with Kreitler and Niv (2007) when

defining quality of life as a phenomenological construct which provides an image of the situation without explaining why or how it appeared. In this sense, she defines it as “experiential and evaluative as it presents a judgment with no intention to relate it with objective variables; it is dynamic, flexible and meaningful for every subject and it is multi-dimensional as it is not based only on a global measurement, but in specific domains identified as constitutive of the quality of life” (Tonon 2009, p. 78).

The importance of this theoretical look transcends the Argentine borders to be taken into account all over the Latin American region as the actions concerning the quality of life of members the traditionally poor and vulnerable. The communities are assumed, in these countries, from the State, through the political actions and decisions in which the point of view of the community is not generally taken into account, just the attributions of quality made by the public sector experts are admitted.

On the basis of what has been presented so far, “rural quality of life” is assumed, in this reflection, as a category constructed according to the following connotations: political, derived from the liberties the young peoples from the Colombian Andean high mountains have to participate actively and effectively in the decisions that affect or may affect what they consider a good rural life, for their families and the surrounding communities where they are immersed; economic, resulting from the opportunities to use the physical-material resources of the environment to execute actions they consider necessary to have a good rural life and; socio-cultural, resulting from the opportunities to access the fundamental rights that the State must provide. These considerations are framed in the traditional concept of social well-being, as elaborated by different authors (Bauer 1966; Duncan 1969; Smith 1973; Andrews and Withey 1976; Michalos 1980).

The concept of rural quality of life has also a psycho-social connotation resulting from the evaluation done, at a certain moment, by rural young peoples, about their future perspectives and their global visions of life in general. These considerations are stated in the solid conceptualization presented by contemporary authors (Evans et al. 1985; Casas 1989, 1999; Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell et al. 1976; Tonon 2008, 2009).

### **9.3.2 *The Rural Matter***

The space, in this case the rural space or “the rural matter”, as a social construction, implies recognizing the affections deriving from the activities developed by the inhabitants in a certain time, which manifest themselves through life expressions influenced by their historicity. The space/time takes its form, in the globalized present world, of malleable and adjustable “recipients” or “containers” defined as “concrete but transitory units of human occupation” (Fals Borda 2000, p. 2). Contrary to its stillness and to resistance to change resulting from its physical or material consideration in the XX century, the space is an entity of relative, modifiable and changing dimensions resulting from its joining to expansions and to historical and

demographic contractions related to collective needs; determined, then, by the point of view of the qualified observer.

The “recipients” in which the historical dimension is considered and its rigid and intangible conception of the linear block of spatial containers is put aside, and according to their physical or material consideration, are conceived as *bio-spaces*, “places” or “sites” defined as units predisposed to be adjusted or revised as a reflection of live realities. They configure themselves as a “response to local or regional processes of social, economic and political development which bind vital production and reproduction activities with the places where they are executed and from where elements of social continuity and cultural diversity are derived” (Fals Borda 2000, p. 9).

The social space thus perceived is an abstract representation that is the result from a specific construction work which provides a point of view about the set of points from where the common agents, in their current behaviors, “direct their looks towards the social world” (Bourdieu 1998, p. 169). In this sense, the biospaces<sup>9</sup> are fundamental because of the role they play in the formation of personality and culture, as they are the places where the inhabiting people use their collective memory permanently, with the aim to infer the present on the basis of their own stories and to presuppose the future based upon their personal goals.

Based upon these considerations, the “rural space” is recognized as the space/time determined by the point of view of rural young peoples who are considered highly-qualified current agents, to manifest themselves through expressions where the reality of the various rural processes of economic, social or cultural nature are taken into account. The Colombian Andean high mountains thus become a *bio-space* with a relatively homogeneous historical-cultural binding that makes its young observers valid elements to express their points of view and, consequently, trains them to act as key research informants. Taken into account that in these biospaces, collective life is expressed and felt in its ordinariness, the meanings that they construct on the space where they are immersed become an entangled network of meanings whose interpretation contributes, altogether, to the comprehension of the meaning they give to the “rural quality of life”, “rural young people” and “the rural” environment.

### 9.3.3 Berger & Luckmann Phenomenological Constructivism

Berger and Luckmann (2001) propose an interpretation of the construction of society and of the configuration of social identity. Social identity is assumed as a part

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<sup>9</sup> In “the rural matter”, bio-spaces are formed by relatively homogeneous zones such as “ecosystems, uncultivated lands, hydrographic basins, historical-cultural regions, ethnic territories and indigenous reservations, farming reservation zones, natural parks, provinces, associated municipalities and neighborhoods- small villages”, while in the city, neighborhoods, localities or zones, diverse circuits, districts and metropolitan and sub-urban areas are founded” (Fals Borda 2000, p. 9).

of a continuous and dialectical process consisting of three periods: externalization, where a social order constituted through social interaction processes is constructed; objectification, where the social order that has been constructed objectifies by hiding its human genesis in symbolic representations and becomes strange to new generations and; internalization, where the objectified social world projects itself again in consciousness through the process of socialization. In this sense, the habituation and institutionalization categories define the externalization moment, while those of primary and secondary socialization and re-socialization define the moment of internalization. The habituation process, which precedes any institutionalization, identifies itself with the actions that retain the meanings of the individuals, which embed themselves as routines in their “store of general knowledge”, remain available and save energy which facilitates the development of activities with a minimal decision margin (Berger and Luckmann 2001, p. 74).

Institutionalization, on its part, emerges when habitualized actions typify reciprocally among types of actors, constructing themselves in the course of a shared history, but not in a determined moment, a situation that makes it impossible to understand what an institution is if we do not understand the historical process where it is produced. In young peoples, the typification of meanings constructed by themselves derives, first, from the possibility acquired to participate in the same events and in the same vital contents; that is, to belong to a same generation, and not the fact of being born chronologically at the same time or “to be young in the same period as others” (Mannheim 1993, p. 216). Second, the institutions, by the fact of existing, independent from any sanction mechanism created for their support, control human behavior when establishing guidelines previously defined which define a determined action, thus defining “social control” (Berger and Luckmann 2001, p. 76).

From this perspective, the traditional conception that identifies adolescence and young people as transition states to the future enjoyment of rights, when being in legal age, or as a preparation to assume responsibilities when in legal age, has been modified. Instead of this legal character, citizenship acquires a social and political character in the family, at school, at work, where primary and secondary socialization processes are implemented, and where children, adolescents and young peoples acquire behavior guidelines to construct social control, in this case, in the rural context of the Colombian Andean high mountains.

At the moment of internalization, the individual is trained to become a member of the society through the primary and secondary socialization and through the re-socialization processes (Berger and Luckmann 2001). Through primary socialization, the internalization process goes on in early childhood when the individuals come into contact with members of the family and close relatives with whom they have strong affection ties, they accept the roles and attitudes of those other signifiers, internalize them and takes them over when they identify with them in a generalized form; that is, with a generality of others, it is to say, with a society. In this sense, the formation within consciousness, of the generalized other marks a decisive stage in the socialization process. It implies, consequently, the internalization of society per se and by the objective reality established in itself and, at the same

time, the subjective establishment of a coherent and continuous identity (Berger and Luckmann 2001, p. 16).

The secondary socialization induces the already socialized individuals to new sectors of the objective world of their society and imposes them a new social order as a regulatory framework of human action, without emotional burdens or great biographic impacts; an absence that complicates the destruction of the internalized entity in the primary socialization. This process advances after early childhood in spaces such as school, work or other places different from home or the family. Re-socialization, for its part, known as "alternation", makes possible the transformation of that internalized reality through the reinterpretation of the past according to the current reality. This process, which requires a plausibility structure, permits a rupture in the subjective biography of the individual, in the form of "before..." and "after...". Contrary to secondary socialization in which the ground of reality is in the past, the basis of re-socialization lies in the present (Berger and Luckmann 2001, p. 198).

This perspective sets out the role, which for the young peoples in the Colombian Andean high mountains, is provided by the family, the school, the work in its various modalities and by the State, by means of public management, in the construction and interpretation of "rural young peoples" condition and in the construction and interpretation of the "rural quality of life". In this sense, we pretend to understand the way how the rural young peoples in the Colombian Andean high mountains are configured as social actors capable of transforming the rural environment where they are immersed, with the aim to reach a better rural quality of life for themselves, their families and for their surrounding community.

### ***9.3.4 Alain Touraine's Social Actor and Subject Theses***

Alain Touraine's theses have become the theoretical support which allows one to understand how rural young peoples, in the context of the study, configure themselves as "Subjects" and, subsequently, as "Social actors", thus facilitating a better interpretation of the findings.

As Subjects they configure themselves when they acquire the capacity to assume themselves as actors of their own lives, that is to say, when they are "able to have projects, to elect, to judge positively or negatively, and they are able also, more simply, to have social relations, be they cooperation, consensus or conflictive relations" (Touraine 1996, p. 41). The capacity to be the protagonists of their own history is of great importance as lacking such a capacity makes such forms to be lived "as an incoherent series of accidents" (Touraine 2000, p. 272). This configuration as "Subjects" is determined by the family which provides protection, security and initiative in childhood which, at the same time, offers the capacity to transform oneiric wishes in realistic projects; the school that provides, through language and the information supplied in the course of study, the capacity "to know the social field where action

will take place”, and the work which provides the social space where these capacities are exerted.

The condition of “Social actor” transcends that of the “Subject” when, besides being the protagonists of their own transformation, the individuals configure themselves as protagonists of the transformation of the environment where they are immersed, a case in which, besides having the conditionings which define them as Subjects, they also acquire the Citizen Consciousness. This consciousness is acquired only when the individuals recognize that their participation, besides being active is effective, that is, when the expression of their opinions are taken into account in the decisions and actions of those who have the power to decide and act. Effectively, only when the people perceive that their appreciations influence government decisions and actions, it is to say, that they are taken into account in “the decisions that affect their collective life, which is recognized and visibilized” (Touraine 1996, pp. 43–44), that is when citizen consciousness is acquired.

Research assumes the rural young peoples of the Colombian Andean high mountains as “Subjects” who are in the capacity to act, opine, contradict, argue, and construct life projects and to impose scopes to achieve their goals. They are also assumed to be “Social actors” or essential protagonists for the development of the rural community where they live and coexist every day, that is, as individuals who not only have personal projects but try to achieve objectives and personal projects in an environment constituted by other actors; an “environment which constitutes a collectivity to which they feel they belong to and whose culture and functioning rules become their rules, although just partially” (Touraine 1996, p. 43). From this theoretical perspective the young peoples from the Colombian Andean high mountains are assumed to be “Subjects” and “Social actors”, that is to say, as people who are valid to be consulted and taken into account with respect to their perception about the “quality of life” and “life projects”.

## 9.4 Methodological Design

Methodologically, the study is based upon a sound theory that makes it possible to widen the existing theory or to generate a new one, derived from the data systematically compiled and analyzed by means of a research process. It is a method where the data gathering, its analysis and the emerging categories have a straight relation among themselves and, where the analysis meets the requirement to be the interaction among researchers and the data, thus being, at the same time, science and art. It is science in the sense that it keeps a certain degree of rigor and is based upon data analysis and, it is art in the sense that creativity “manifests itself in the capacity of researchers to adequately denominate categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons and make an innovating, integrated and realistic outline of sets of disorganized data (Strauss and Corbin 2002, p. 14).

The Grounded Theory establishes the difference between description and theory. The first refers to what is happening, events, actions, scenes, emotions, moods and

expectations, and it nourishes with the current vocabulary to express ideas about things, people and places; it also makes use of similes and metaphors, facilitates the communication among people. In short, “the descriptive details chosen by who is telling a story are usually consciously or unconsciously selective and are based upon what the teller saw or heard or thinks that it is important” (Strauss and Corbin 2002, p. 20). When making theory, on the contrary, events and happenings are not only described “but also the analysis is extended in a way to include interpretations to explain why, when, where, what and how events happen” (Strauss and Corbin 2002, p. 21).

From Grounded Theory, theories are classified as substantive and formal. A theory derived from a substantive area or theory is used to explain and to handle the problems of a social group, in a specific place, such as the one concerning rural young peoples in the Colombian Andean high mountains, whose results are secured in this reflection. It relates to the permanent interaction achieved by the researcher in the process of data gathering, from which new hypotheses to be verified emerge. In this sense, “it is the result of the systematic processing by means of coding and categorization of the field data” (Murcia and Jaramillo 2000, p. 73). Formal theories are less specific with reference to a group and a place, being this the reason why they are applied to a wider range of problems and disciplinary topics (Strauss and Corbin 2002); they are identified through the style of gathering and analysis of theoretical data, by which hypotheses are constructed and the substantive theory is constantly compared.

### ***9.4.1 Type of Study***

This research study is a qualitative one which, due to its interpretivist character accepts its reflexivity principle, the rationale of ethnographic research and, at the same time, makes emphasis on the social actors' “lived experiences”; in this case, the rural young peoples of the Colombian Andean high mountains in their daily lives, as the researcher's experience and knowledge, in the world of social sciences. We turn then to Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (1994), mainly to the first, who has been recognized and quoted as the “representative of interpretativists who pursue a synthesis between social realism and constructivism” (Valles 1999, p. 60).

To assume the material and social reality of the rural young peoples from the Colombian Andean high mountains as a representation built by everyone implies to unveil the meanings with which they, individually or collectively, intervene in this reality. In this sense, the researcher, with the intention to understand the meanings that rural young peoples give to “Rural Young people” and to “rural quality of life”, gets into and becomes part of the socio-cultural system under study, interacts as one more element of the structure and reflects about one's own perception being elaborated (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994, pp. 15, 31). An emphasis is made on the experience lived by the rural young peoples, an experience that the researcher shares in the field work and that leads him to a permanent reflection about the

incidence of his participation and his own experience and that of the “rural young peoples”, subjects of this study. From this perspective, the role of ethnography is not to describe, but to “reflect on the perception that the researcher progressively constructs on that reality” (Murcia and Jaramillo 2000, p. 71).

The methodological “complementarity” in this research retakes all and every one of the elements of reflexive ethnography and similar perspectives and makes it possible to use a plurality of approaches and techniques, methodologies and theories aiming at the comprehension of behaviors and conducts that respond to the complexity of the problems under discussion, and not, on the contrary, that the problem be presented as a response to a certain approach and exclusive theory, a procedure that at present encounters a generalized refusal. In this sense, the inquiry is guided by an “emergent design” which is structured from the successive findings obtained during the full development of the research and is characterized by its “construction and reconstruction in the search for information (Briones 2002, p. 12).

The “emergent design”, as the basis of *reflexive ethnography* and the method of Grounded theory to build a new theory, faces the problem by which the researcher cannot start a research with a list of preconceived concepts, a guiding theoretical framework or a well-defined design, because “the concepts and design must be allowed to emerge from the data” (Strauss and Corbin 2002, p. 38). Accordingly, a process through which the development of a research is designed, once started, finds a free way “through a slow process of gradual configuration, which would manifest itself in categories apparently unconnected and, which when being reflected would show a connection among themselves” (Murcia and Jaramillo 2000, p. 96). The problem lies, then, in that the initial data must give way to the design of a guide to focus on the gradual development of the research, and the initial data obtained at the very first moment of research.

Accordingly, *the initial exploration of reality* allows one to define relevant initial data that favor the extraction of hypotheses and questions to be demonstrated with methods, instruments and techniques used in the remaining moments where the research develops. The results from the application, analysis and interpretation of data are contrasted permanently with the formal theory referents, the research background and the information on the socio-cultural scenario, with the aim to permanently state the possible substantive categories and their relations whose final reflection, at the last moment, widens or modifies the existing theoretical and conceptual referents.

The methodological premises already presented allow one to elaborate, initially, a survey that will be administered to a representative sample of 544 rural young peoples, men and women, workers and students, with ages ranging from 16 to 29 years, from the potato-growing sub-region in the Cundiboyacense High Plateau, with the aim to complete its general characterization. Subsequently, detailed interviews will be administered to a significant sample of rural young peoples, from which the accounts can permit to reflect on their perceptions on the “rural quality of life” are extracted.



### 9.4.2 *The Use of Triangulation*

Research methods and techniques are defined by the object of research and taking into consideration that in the field of Sociology various objects are demarcated—society with its own dynamics, society as a product from man and the man as a product from society—the resulting explanation of social reality depends on which of these objects is put ahead (Cea 1999, p. 44). The object of study in this research has to deal, first, with the man being as a product of society, in this case, with the configuration of “rural young people” in the context of the Colombian Andean high mountains. It is also worth to consider the results from the guarantees offered by society to potentiate the corresponding capacities and to exert one's own rights and, second, with the society as a product of man, which refers to the “rural young people” as a psycho-social actor, trained to influence the development processes of the rural community, to exert the rights to become a guide or an example of life in the search of what is perceived as the “rural quality of life”.

This pluralistic conception of the object of research leads to triangulation, which could be of different types: (a) triangulation of information sources, whose value consists of verifying the inferences extracted from an information source by means of another information source; (b) triangulation among researchers, generated by different observers who favor the formation of a constellation of complementary data and (c) triangulation of techniques that facilitates the comparison of information obtained from the application of different techniques (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994).

Through the triangulation of information sources, the information about the same phenomenon is compared, although obtained in different moments of the field work, at different points of the temporary cycles existing in that place or, as it happens in this research, by comparing the narrations from the various participants (the ethnographer included) involved in the field. In case diverse types of information lead to the same conclusion, it is possible to rely a little more on the conclusions. The triangulation of techniques, for its part, permits, from the perspective of reflexive ethnography, their combination, which makes it possible to prove the validity of the data from different and from each one of the techniques used (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994, pp. 216, 217). The triangulation of methods consists of their combination and the measurement of the same analysis unit (Cea 1999, p. 54). Triangulation in the interpretative presentation of data refers to the presentation of categories from the support of a formal theory that sustains its interpretation and comprehension, from the socio-cultural narrations and from the researcher's subjective interpretation. Finally, triangulation from the reviewing of formal theories consists of interpreting the category under study from various theoretical approaches (Murcia and Jaramillo 2000, p. 160).

Triangulation of information sources is used in this research study as it compares the information obtained by different actors according to their age ranges and gender, occupation and working activity they are devoted to. Equally, the triangulation among techniques is also used as it verifies the validity of statistical data from the

initial administration of a survey, with the ethnographic data from the participating observation in the socio-cultural context, along with the data from the administration of in-depth interviews applied to rural young peoples in their own milieu. Obviously, triangulation is used in the interpretative presentation of data, as the categories are presented from the support of various theories, from the socio-cultural narrations by rural young peoples and from the researcher's subjective interpretation. Besides, triangulation is implemented from the reviewing of formal theories, which consists of reflecting about the categories of "the rural", "young people" and "quality of life", from different theoretical approaches.

### 9.4.3 *Research Moments*

First moment: exploration of reality

It refers to the complementary and parallel reviewing of documents, maps, texts and standards that permit, on the one hand, to define the research substantive or problem area, to structure a theoretical framework, to formulate hypotheses from formal theory and to review research antecedents and; on the other hand, to gradually discover the various parts that define the socio-cultural tangle of the Colombian Andean zone. Besides, an exploratory visit to the socio-cultural context is made, which facilitates its empirical knowledge and the delimitation of the adequate scenario for the development of the research field work. The findings from this *general exploration of reality* allow one to structure the research project and to design a possible guideline that will pave the road to the *pre-configuration of reality*, to take place in the second moment.

The exploratory visit to the socio-cultural context takes place in the course of four weeks, in three-day trips per week to the rural zone of the municipalities of Pasca and Villapinzón, in the state of Cundinamarca. These municipalities are selected taking into account their belonging to the Cundiboyacense Plateau, the settlement of high-mountain rural communities with the presence of both male and female young peoples, and their differentiating agricultural and cattle production. This visit aims at exploring the "rural young people's" reality through observations that range from non-participative ones to participative observations, apart from informal interviews to rural young peoples who are devoted to different occupations. This very first moment of the research is facilitated by the knowledge the researcher has of the zone where other research studies and field works have been done, and by the collaboration of assistant professionals, regional technicians, agricultural engineers and zoo-technician veterinary doctors from the University of Cundinamarca, while being the Dean to the School of Agriculture and Livestock Sciences of the above mentioned institution, professionals to whom informal interviews are also administered.

This first exploration allows obtaining general data related to occupation, working performance, study, civil status, dependence and family of rural young peoples, besides it permits one to have information about land tenure and propriety of the crops. Once these data have been identified, which are considered as possible

pre-categories or emergent subjective categories, it is necessary to deepen, at this precise moment, in the formal theory with reference to modernization and its influence on the design and formulation of young people policies, based upon the validity of the 1991 Constitution with all its antecedents.

The findings from the *general exploration of reality* allow one to elaborate, as a conclusion from this first moment, a thematic dimension entitled *Modernization and Young people in Latin America and in Colombia*, where socio-cultural categories from the modernization paradigm are identified (Parsons and Platt 1973; Parsons 1974, 1984; Almond and Powell 1972; Rostow 1973), and also possible substantive pre-categories are envisaged.

Guideline for the pre-configuration of reality.

Before the lack of reliable information, it is planned to carry out a second moment of the research: a general characterization of the young people population belonging to the selected socio-cultural scenario by means of the design, application and interpretation of a survey oriented to them. In this sense, the results from the *general exploration of reality* facilitate the design of a guideline to pre-configure reality in the following moment, which contains the following elements:

- Formulation of questions. Such questions orient the process at the second moment of the research. ¿How are the high-mountain young peoples and the traditional farming production in the Colombian Andean zone characterized? ¿How does the socio-cultural context have an impact on this characterization?
- Survey design. Its application, analysis and interpretation allow to characterize juvenile population and to identify relations among some of the emerging pre-categories, with the aim to confront them with formal theory and to define the second *thematic dimension* of the study. The surveys designed are submitted, at the same moment of the *general exploration of reality*, to a pilot test in the municipality of Pasca, where 30 of them are administered; errors in the formulation of questions are detected and, at the same time, they are adequately corrected.
- Definition of places where to administer the test. Provinces, municipalities and rural villages where to administer the tests are defined; the assignment of four months and of a team of four people, a main researcher and three assistant professionals for the application and analysis, as well as for the determination of a representative sample of the population to apply the test. Almeidas and Ubaté are selected as the high representativity provinces in the rural zone of the potato-growing sub-region at the Cundiboyacense High Plateau, in view of the presence of a rural population higher than 70% of the total population, a high farming vocation that offers more than 80% of jobs to the rural young peoples located 2700 m above sea level, and the possession of the biggest rural extension of all the other provinces lying in the socio-cultural scenario previously identified.
- A conglomerate sampling design is used as the object of a study population—as the rural young people of the Cundiboyacense High Plateau potato-growing sub-region is distributed in the villages of the municipalities belonging to the provinces selected. The conglomerates correspond to the influence geographic areas in which the Province of Almeidas and the Province of Ubaté are divided. In the

Province of Almeidas, the municipalities of Machetá, Manta, Sesquilé, Suesca and Tiribitá are selected, while in the Province of Ubaté are the municipalities of Carmen de Carupa, Cucunubá, Fúquene, Lenguaque and Tausa, all of them with their corresponding rural villages.

- The selection of rural villages and the determination of their population are at random, as all of the villages of the municipalities have the same probability to be selected. Before the lack of the exact information about the population by age ranges in the villages, the population percentage between 14 and 29 years is determined in the rural zone of the state of Cundinamarca, on the basis of SISBEN<sup>10</sup> data. Given that 42% of the rural population is in this age range, the population in each of the villages of the municipalities of the sample is estimated. Because of equal affixation for all of the villages of each municipality, the application of 554 surveys is determined, from which at the moment of cleaning the applied forms, eight (8) of them are discarded, for a total of 546.
- Determination of observation places and application of surveys. The populations where rural young peoples devote to study and to work, and the populations where farming, commercial, mining or home activities (exclusively by young women) are carried out, are taken into account. Likewise, the communicative manifestations of rural youngsters reflecting an attitude toward their daily practices, understood as observation elements to be carried out parallel to the administration of the surveys, are also taken into account. These practices must be consigned in the field diaries that each of the members of the survey team must fill out.
- Determination of software for the analysis of surveys. It has been stated to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 15.0, which permits to obtain descriptive statistics, contingency tables and correlation analyses, among others.

#### Second moment: Pre-configuration of reality

At this moment and for the first time, there is an access to the selected socio-cultural scenario, with the aim to do the referential field work represented in the application of surveys to rural young peoples within the ranges and the villages selected in the preceding moment. The characterization of young peoples in the socio-cultural scenario where the research takes place as a result from the surveys, the relations and correlations defined and the confrontation with formal theory with which the substantive area of the study is approached and with the theory that re-dimensions it, facilitate the elaboration of a second thematic dimension entitled *Rural young people and social integration in Colombia*, which becomes the socio-cultural pre-structure of reality. The “working young people” and the “studying young people” categories, which refer to the situation of young peoples in the Andean high

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<sup>10</sup> SISBEN. Information system that permits one to identify, classify and select the people and the families who live in poverty, with the aim to let them have access to subsidies and other benefits provided by the Government. The data were supplied by the State Office of SISBEN, at the Office of Planning of the State of Cundinamarca, by its Coordinator Engineer José Delgado on August 1, 2007.

mountain context, the traditional farming production and the re-definition of “the rural matter” emerge from the above mentioned pre-structure.

From the substantive or problem area, the theoretical approaches from which it is dimensioned and re-dimensioned, the socio-cultural scenario and the thematic dimension constructed at the end of the first moment, as well as the characterization of young peoples in the study scenario, the relations and correlations established and the thematic dimension constructed in the second moment, envisage the design of the guideline for the configuration of reality; this configuration is developed in the third moment of the research.

Guideline for the configuration of reality. Reality is configured through the development of the following activities.

- Formulation of new questions. These result from the analyses of surveys and correlation studies. ¿What meanings do the young peoples from the Colombian Andean zone give to everything that influences their perception about their own reality and the reality of the Andean rural world where they are immersed? At the same time, other questions resulting from or turning around these questions appear: ¿What meanings do the young peoples from the Colombian Andean zone give to school, to work, to the State and to the incidence of these factors in their configuration as “rural young peoples”? ¿Do the young peoples from the Colombian Andean zone, who are students, configure in the same form as those of the same biological age and who already work? ¿What meanings do young peoples in this context give to the rural space where they are immersed?.
- Determination of the research scenario. The municipalities of Tausa and Cucunubá are defined as those where deep field work takes place, through the application of in-depth interviews, life histories and notes from field diaries.
- Design of a proof list. It permits one to guide the in-depth interviews in order to define an adequate control by the interviewer. They are open questions that are applied once the key social actors have been selected; it is the result from the analysis of the surveys applied, from the characterization and correlation studies that were developed in the second moment and the questions formulated in this guideline.

#### Third moment: Configuration of reality

In this moment, the in-depth field work represented by the application of in-depth interviews, the participating observation and the notes of the field diary, is advanced. The interviews are applied to the selected “key informants”, initially, as the product from the analysis of results obtained in the second moment, and on the field, because of its consideration as necessary, at random, using the “snowball” technique, through which an interviewee leads another with the characteristics required by the research and according to the moment. They are guided holistic interviews, previously elaborated as a result from the questions arising from the surveys and in accordance with the object of the research study, constituted by the life, experiences, ideas, values and symbolic structure of rural young peoples, here and now, everything with the aim to unveil their emotions, feelings and subjectivities.

The interviews go after personalized information by treating the subjects in their exclusive originality, from the meanings that they themselves elaborate by means of what they call “common sense” (Sierra 1998 pp. 299, 301). The topics to be dealt with, stated in the *guideline of configuration of reality*, elaborated in the preceding moment, and their interpretation, make up the *socio-cultural structure* of reality and stands for the major approximation to the substantive theory intended to be elaborated at the end of the research process, re-dimensioned by the bio-space and territory theories (Fals Borda 2000) and by the political conception of the “Subject” (Touraine 2000). This socio-cultural structure is achieved through the first conceptualization about the essence of the actions and interactions that have been exhibited by reality, thus structuring a new thematic dimension with the title of “the rural young people: from Subject to social actor”.

The in-depth interviews are administered to Cucunubá and Tausa rural young peoples, taking care that they be either workers or students. With reference to the first, those performing working activities such as farming, commerce, mining, public and home; the second ones, taking different degrees of formal or non-formal education. Men and women; single, married or even in free union; in age ranges from 14 to 18 years, from 19 to 24 years, and from 25 to 29 years, are selected.

The municipalities where the interviews are administered—Cucunubá and Tausa in the province of Ubaté—are selected due to the presence of both male and female young peoples and to the fact that the interviews detect a shared presence of young peoples, men and women, single, married and in free union, students, workers and unemployed, of different ages, who carried out the activities already described. Besides, they take into account the presence of young peoples that have constituted a family and have left the paternal home, of young peoples who, although having constituted their own home, they continue living in the paternal home, and of young peoples, “family children”, who receive the protection from their parents, being these aspects identified in the analysis of the surveys administered. These conditions differentiate the selected municipalities as an adequate space for the administration of the in-depth interviews that allow the young peoples to answer, besides the initial questions of the research, those that arise in different moments. On the other side, the socio-economic and socio-political conditions of the selected municipalities are similar to the conditions of the municipalities in the Cundiboyacense High Plateau and, in general, of the Colombian Andean zone.

The participant observation gradually accompanies all the development of the research, that is, it goes from the passive participation of the first and second moments to the active and complete participation in this third moment of the research process. The researcher involves himself in these activities and deeply observes the situation through the selection of topics of interest, social situations, scenarios, groups and individuals (Valles 1999, p. 169). This observation is done in units of farming production, mainly in potato crops, and in mines, schools and other rural spaces where there are activities involving the young peoples.

The notes of field diaries become a fundamental instrument in the study. They literally register the “native” language used by rural young peoples which differs from that used by the researcher; when describing observations, the trend to use the

language of social science is avoided. The notes are taken at the moment or immediately after an in-depth field work session and they include all types of notes about everything seen and heard by the observer, without being too detailed (Valles 1999, p. 170). They are *expanded*, that is, they are written from the preceding notes, some hours after field work has taken place, and they register experiences, affection, fear, anger, confusion and solution feelings, as well as other aspects that are useful not to put aside the researcher's biases. Everything that has been observed, the theoretical perspectives being used and the researcher's training are in the *analysis and interpretation notes*, which are located between the preceding notes and the final writing.

Guideline for the configuration of reality. The findings from the third moment of the research are fundamental for the design of the *guideline for the re-configuration of reality*, which takes place in the fourth and last moments. It is based on the reviewing, analysis and interpretation of the information gathered in each of the preceding moments, with the aim to widen and to modify the existing theoretical and conceptual referents, on the basis of the experiences shared by the researcher with the rural young peoples, the corresponding researching experience and the knowledge of the context.

The reconfiguration guideline formulates, as the result from the three moments already described, the question that finally tries to meet the objectives of the research study: ¿How to understand the meaning that the young peoples of the Colombian Andean zone give to their condition of protagonists of their own development and of protagonists of the development of the rural society where they are immersed? Other questions derive from these questions, which ask about ¿How to understand the meaning young peoples who are students give to their condition? ¿How to understand the meaning young people of the same biological age who work give to their condition? The answers to these questions allow one to interpret their perceptions about what they consider a good rural life and the way to get it, which is the rationale of the reflection in this chapter.

#### Fourth moment: Re-configuration of reality

It deals with the theoretical and conceptual condensation of the critical analysis of the socio-cultural structure resulting from the work developed in the preceding moments and its relation with each of the categories that make it; in other words, it is the synthesis of the whole process. It is formulated and supported in this sense, in the general conclusions, under the title of "*Rural young people: between the social present need and the social moratorium*", the thesis that states not only the existence of "rural young people" with its own characteristics but also states the existence of "different types of rural young people" in the Colombian Andean high mountain zone and in the traditional farming production.

It is precisely in this moment when the "rural quality of life" categories and the "rural subject", "rural social actor" and "rural psychosocial actor" sub-categories emerge, as a result from from the interpretations developed on the perceptions of the rural young peoples in the context of the research study. The purpose, then, of this work, is the comprehension of the meaning given to the "rural quality of life"

and the way young peoples believe that it can be reached in the Colombian Andean high mountains.

## **9.5 The Way How the Category “Rural Quality of Life” Emerges**

The life histories and the in-depth interviews administered to key informants, three workers and three students, selected from the 11 people who define the significant sample in the original research study, allow one to describe the way they construct their meanings about the rural quality of life. They orient themselves, in general terms, by the characteristics of the rural context where they act day by day and their meddling and determination in what they perceive as a good and satisfactory life style, the way how life passes in reality and the way how they assume themselves as trained to reach what they consider necessary to live satisfactorily or to reach, what ‘Sen’ calls, “valuable functioning” (Sen 1996, p. 56), that is, how to define scopes and how to construct life projects.

In this section, there is initially the description of the perceptions concerning the evaluation of the conditions that the rural contexts offer the young peoples in order to satisfy their material and physical, individual and collective needs, and to bet on new targets, short and medium term, that will let them “go ahead” in life. “To go ahead” is perceived as betting the targets defined by themselves where each target offers personal and community satisfactions that will give them the possibility to go on positively toward other targets whose accomplishment will be translated in the accumulation of great satisfactions. In this sense, “to go ahead” demands sacrifices that will be rewarded with great satisfactions which, at last, allow them to improve the living conditions.

Afterwards, the perceptions derived from the evaluation of their experiences, present situations and global visions of life, on their way to reach a last objective that is consolidated when they reach what they call to “be somebody” in life are described; as a process in which material and psychosocial connotations are also taken into account. To take into account these connotations comprehensively favors the emergence of the “quality of life” socio-cultural category, which derives, ultimately, from the interpretation of the Colombian Andean high mountain rural young peoples, workers and students’ perceptions, as constructed by the researcher.

### ***9.5.1 To “Go Ahead” in Life by the Young Workers***

Rural young peoples who are devoted to work, be it in the mines, in farming activities or in commerce, perceive “the rural matter” as a means that meets the physical or material conditions to live one’s life. In this sense, they relate with the hard effort they must make to reach the goals they define from an early age when they integrate



themselves to society through work or they form new homes independent from their parents. It is the way it is perceived by three young workers of the Cundiboyacense High Plateau potato-growing sub-region who respond to the in-depth interviews:

The first is a young 26-year-old potato farmer, born in the Paramo Alto village of the municipality of Tausa, state of Cundinamarca, who starts working at the age of 11, thus accumulating a great experience at his age.

I was born in the Paramo Alto village, Tausa [...] We are four [referring to himself and to the number of siblings], two women and two men [...] my sisters at home with my parents, my other brother is working there in the countryside [...] With reference to study, I only completed the fifth grade of primary school, my sisters finished secondary school, and they are studying to be teachers, and when my brother will complete the fifth grade of primary school he will start working in the countryside [...] My father is a farmer [...] my mother is a housewife. (H/Ed:26/JoTa)<sup>11</sup>.

Now at present, here in this village, I have [...] more or less 8 hectares (he refers to hectares cultivated in potatoes), because up there in Ladera Grande I have other 20 hectares [...] and about 15 workers. (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

The second is a young worker at one of the coal mines in the municipality of Tausa. He is 23 years old and was born in the village of Sabaneque, in this municipality. This is the way he describes his history:

I studied until I was 12 and at that moment I started to work and when I was 15 I started living with a woman who is my wife nowadays [...] I started working from that time on: I have three children and I work in the mine [...] I'm a coachman [...] there are 12 strikers, they go in and strike coal and I pick it up with a coach. I work at 90 m under the surface. (H/Ed:23/JoTm).

The third informant is a young lady with an age of 22, the owner of a small store in the Paramo Bajo village, in the municipality of Tausa, who hopes to continue her professional studies using her own resources:

I took all my primary school here, from Kindergarden, here at the same high school [high school refers to the school at Paramo Bajo village], up to the eleventh grade in the same institution [...] we have always worked to [...] *go ahead*. (M//Ed:22/JoTc).

With me, we are seven [with reference to the number of siblings], some of them work, others are studying and others are already married [...] and the rest of them are farmers, they grow potatoes (M//Ed:22/JoTc).

I have my small business [a grocery store in the village] and God willing, next year I will start studying in Ubaté (M//Ed:22/JoTc).

For these young workers, the rural zone is the space where they must work hard, far from the presence of the State, to reach the goals that will let them "go ahead" in life, as they say. In this sense, they are very critical about the scarce help from the State, both to guarantee the right to an education and to work in the farming zone, a situation which induces them, from an early age, to define short-term goals which

<sup>11</sup> (H/Ed:26/JoTa). This is the coding used in this chapter which accompanies the narrations from now on. [H or M] refers to the informant's sex, thus, H: male, M: female; [Ed:26] is the age of the informant, in this case, 26 years; [Jo] means young and [T] means work or the informant's activity, thus: E: student, Ta: farm worker, Tc: commercial worker, Tm: mine worker, and Th: home worker.

contribute to abandoning school or to abandoning the early integration to society. This is how they express it:

I live here in the countryside, what do I study for [...] it means we lose our motivation ¿What am I studying for, what for? If I will never become a professional, then ¿what do I spend money studying for? (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

This very same perception, with reference to the support opportunities to study, is the same with reference to another young worker:

One finishes the fifth grade of primary school and the first thing one has to do is to look for a job in a farm or in the mine, because there are no more options [...] Here in this town we never get any support (H/Ed:23/Jo/Tm).

The woman, for her part, expresses the critical situation with respect to the opportunities to work or study offered by the rural environment:

There are no opportunities for the youngsters, this is why many times they say, for example, as a woman [...] what do we study for? If anyway we will become housewives, as here there are no opportunities. (M/Ed:22/JoTc).

The perception they have about the incapacity of the State to guarantee the fundamental right to an education is the same as they have with reference to the State's incapacity to guarantee the right to rural work. As a matter of fact, they perceive the State's action as a timely and valid one for the big and technified agricultural production in the flat and in the medium-slope zones, but not valid for the farming production in the high mountains. In this sense, with reference to the affectations to agricultural production as a result from the climatic change, they express the following:

One [...] has the same rights, but what happens is that the State, the administration, does not collaborate because we have nothing, for example, we will collaborate with this man who owns this farm, and to say something, because the dry period affected him, but as we do not have anything, we do not receive anything (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

The young person who does not work in farming, but in mining does not have a similar perception with reference to the State's actions concerning the support to rural lodging:

Lodging, for example, we need it. Here in town, Col\$300,000.00 are given to those of the urban sector, when somebody from the countryside comes and asks the Mayor: *Mayor I need a subsidy, there is nothing, there is nothing*, they simply support the people from the urban sector while they do not do it with the people from the countryside (H/Ed:23/Jo/Tm).

The young female worker, for her part, expresses the scarce interest of the State towards rural young peoples:

Rural people, we are left at God's mercy, the State does not show any interest, I do not see whether they are interested in rural young peoples. (M/Ed:22/JoTc).

With reference to medium-term goals, young peoples express their desire to consolidate a major economic stability that will let them offer working possibilities to the members of the rural community where they are immersed. This is the way they perceive this situation:

In my case my expectations [...] are to have my little farm and to employ people, as in this moment [He refers to having a property on the cropland; although the crops are ours or they are shared with other people, the land is rented (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

The medium-term goal for the young lady refers, basically, to getting married and afterwards to have access to a university career; she expresses herself as follows:

My project is [...] first to get married, then to study a systems career and if it is not possible here, we would have to move to the city (M/Ed:22/JoTc).

In the long term, the working young peoples define coinciding goals dealing with the future of their children, when they manifest the interest they have in their children to study, to become professionals and not to follow their parents steps by working from an early age. In this sense, they express the following:

In my case, my children, I want them to become professionals, not to be the same as I am, I will die here [...] I want them *to be somebody* in life, where they will not have to crop potatoes as we do, but that they will have a good level of education, that they will have their positions, something different from being exposed to the sun and to the rain. (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

In this sense, Alexander expresses:

My project would be to have children, to have them study at the university and to become professionals [...] (H/Ed: 23/JoTm).

The young business woman also expresses herself with the same intention:

My dream is to have my son *go ahead*, so that he will have a good future. (M/Ed:22/JoTc).

But at the same time the working young peoples identify “the rural” zone as a space of freedom, nature, peace and tranquility, of responsible and affective people where values, such as solidarity among the members of the community, are evidenced. A space that will offer them better opportunities to “be somebody” in life, that is, to reach an ultimate objective, superior to all goals previously defined. They express it as follows:

Here, at least, we breathe pure air and we live with more tranquility, but in the city that is not possible, here we live well, that is well, for me, in the countryside. (H/Ed:26/JoTa).  
Here there is more freedom, more support within the family, everybody shares, everybody supports everybody else. (M/Ed:22/JoTc).

Up to now, we have the description of working young peoples' perceptions with reference to the conditions offered by the rural environment, to what they call to “go ahead” in life, the conditions that differ from the way the young peoples perceive the dedication to study.

### 9.5.2 To “Go Ahead” in Life by Young Students

The rural young students recognize “the urban” as the space where the State offers better possibilities, with reference to “the rural”, to “go ahead” in life. This is an expression that they, as well as workers, understand as reaching the short, medium

and long-term goals that have been defined in the course of life. Accordingly, the urban sector is the place where young peoples can consolidate their rights, the same rights rural young peoples have, but that in the countryside they cannot consolidate or consolidate just in a partial or deficient manner. This is evidenced by the affirmations by three young students, two women and a man:

One of the women is 16 years old, was born in La Florida village, in the municipality of Cucunubá, state of Cundinamarca, and proudly expresses her dedication to both study and work:

I was born at the Ubaté Hospital, I completed kindergarden, I started when I was four and a half years old, and then I started studying at Policarpa Salavarrieta Public School, there I finished fifth grade and I have been studying at Divino Salvador high-school, from sixth grade on [Educational institutions in the municipality of Cucunubá], my father works as a mechanic and as a farmer..., or whatever there is to be done, my mother is a housewife [...]. I started working about 15 days ago on weekends and I like it ... I have been working in a bakery. (M/Ed:16/JoE).

The man is a young student, 17 years old, born in the municipality of Zipaquirá and is an inhabitant at the Paramo Bajo village in the municipality of Tausa, state of Cundinamarca, who highlights his condition of both student and worker. He describes the situation as follows:

I completed my primary school at the high school here [...], I had my secondary school there too, the name is Páramo Bajo Rural Basic High School [...]. My father is a farmer, he crops potatoes, and my mother is a housewife, but she also has her cows and the like, to see them, to live from them, that is [...] both completed the fifth grade of primary school. (H/Ed:17/JoE).

The third person who was interviewed was a young lady university student, 21 years old, born in Tausa and inhabitant in Paramo Bajo village, who studies Food Engineering at La Salle University in the city of Bogotá:

I was born 21 years ago in Tausa [...] I took part of my primary school here at the Paramo Bajo Rural high school, and the other at the municipality of Tausa, downtown [She refers to the county town]. I completed my secondary school at La Presentación High School in Zipaquirá and then I entered La Salle University, where at present I am taking the ninth semester of Food Engineering [...]. My father is a farmer and my mother is a housewife. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

The knowledge about the importance of the rural matter as a material and physical space in the satisfaction of needs is expressed by the recognition of the inequalities undergone with reference to the urban, with feelings of frustration before the incapacity to implement in the rural space the rights which in the urban zone are evidenced as consolidated. It is expressed as follows:

If the rural young people were taken into account, it would not be the same kind of education we are being offered, but it would be the same as in the urban sector. In the rural sector [...], for example, there is just one teacher for five courses, very different from the urban sector where, for example, there is a teacher for each classroom [...]. We lack well-prepared teachers in English [...], in the systems classrooms there is a lack of computers [...] many laboratories are missing, such as the Chemistry one [...] the objects existing there have been acquired by us, be it to meet some goals or as a donation situation, but the State's help is minimal. (M/Ed:16/JoE).

Similarly, the young university student expresses the following:

The higher education level is highly neglected, then it is a situation that partially affects the quality of life of the people because they do not have the opportunity to have jobs yielding good incomes. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

As it can be easily observed, young students relate education with the opportunity to have better jobs, different from being simple farming or mining workers, and those with better income levels to achieve, according to their perceptions, a better quality of life. This perception, although it does not correspond to that of young workers, coincides with the expectations that the latter have for their children.

Now then, the goals students fix to “go ahead” in life are different from those of the workers, as they do not expect to integrate to society at an early moment, but to skill themselves by means of study for a future integration when they will be ready for it. In case to have a job, they assume it as something temporary, as a means to access some economic resources to be able to reach the goal consisting in finishing their studies. For the young students interviewed, these goals are only achieved with the obliging migration to the city. In this sense, they say the following:

I finish this year [referring to finishing the secondary studies] and I think to go on with my studies for not staying here, to go to the city to *look for a better life*, in other words. I would like to be in the city, to study my electronics, *to go ahead*. (H/Ed:17/JoE).

The young female secondary student has short-term goals which are similar to those expressed by the man:

Well, this year I am going to graduate with honors [...], next year I will go on studying, maybe to take a course [...] and then I will work and get some money to be able to register at a university [...] I expect to get out of here, because here the economy is poor [...] the dream I have is to become a Systems Engineer [...], that would be mainly in the Capital city. (M/Ed:16/JoE).

The university students about to finishing her professional studies talks about her future plans:

To finish the career right now, maybe to take a specialization program [...]. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

With reference to further expectations to finish the studies, the students express their intention to return to the rural sector, to service it, to offer jobs and to create business to benefit the rural community where they are from. They express it as follows:

One should study something [with reference to studying in the city] and to work here in the countryside to develop it, to stay here, in the countryside, to help the most needed rural people [...], for example, as an engineer or something similar, to help. (H/Ed:17/JoE).

In this very same sense, the young secondary student expresses her intention to come back and work in the rural sector:

To set a business but with things related to the countryside. Let's say, with potatoes at an industrial level thus to foster industry here. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

Rural development would be like allowing that the people have the opportunity to study, but that they apply their knowledge in the same rural sector, that they create business or things that benefit the rural sector in order to have development. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

In general terms, to “go ahead” in life is assumed by rural young peoples from the Colombian Andean High Mountains as the achievement of permanent short, medium and long-term goals imposed by daily life, which are fulfilled with sacrifice and dedication before the generalized perception on the State’s absence in the rural communities in the Colombian Andean high mountains. But, ¿what makes the young workers do not want to migrate to the city, no matter the sacrifices they must undergo to “go ahead” in life, and what makes students desire to go back to the rural sector, once they have graduated, after having migrated to be able to finish their studies in the city?

The answer transcends the consideration of the rural sector as a space where the State does not provide the conditions necessary to meet the material needs that allow them to “go ahead”. Young peoples cannot assume this sector as a bio-space that provides the possibility to reach a higher goal, an ultimate objective to which they get near only when they are recognized by the others and they acquire the capacity to recognize themselves as “somebody” in life; this is how these situations are evidenced in the narrations given below.

### ***9.5.3 To “Be Somebody” in Life According to Rural Young People***

The perceptions defined by young peoples, men and women, workers and students, allow them to identify how they construct knowledge on what they call “to be somebody” in life. This means simply to be recognized by the other members of the rural community in the Colombian Andean high mountain zone, and to be perceived, by themselves, as valuable, respectable and admirable people, as life models or examples to follow. They express it in the recognition they have about their parents:

My father [...] taught me how to work [...] he was my teacher or he will go on being my teacher because any way I think I will never reach his height [...] God willing someday I will be like him. (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

The recognition, admiration and respect that the young worker expresses about his father, whom he identifies as a life guide or model coincides with the recognition the young student makes for all his elderly:

One guides oneself by following the more responsible people [...] it is like a guide, like an example for one to *go ahead* and to redo one’s life [...]. Some people are already neat and tidy, more honest and they are a guide, one says that person is a good one, it is necessary to be honest, that is all. (H/Ed:17/JoE).

The interviewed young peoples perceive that a person “becomes somebody” in life when his behavior in the community becomes an example to be followed, a guide to be imitated because of honesty, neatness at work and good behavior as a member of the family and of the rural community. In this sense, the young student says:

To be somebody in life for me would be to be nice with everybody; that at the moment I arrive in this town everybody would greet and say there goes such a person, and tell the children I would like you to be like him someday. (H/Ed:23/JoTm).

Now, to assume oneself as “somebody” in life and to be assumed as such by the rural community where the youngsters are immersed day by day allows them to be closer to happiness. This is expressed by rural young peoples without distinction because of occupation:

To be somebody in life contributes to be happy, it is like being a good young person, I think, that is to be a good person, because being a bad person does not mean to be happy [...] to have a better friend no matter where you go, to be happy, to have friends that is all. (M/Ed:21/JoE).

Happiness is to feel fine with oneself, with the surrounding environment, to be happy with the environment. (M/Ed: 21/JoE).

Quality of life is to be happy, it is like being nice to people, to have friends and to be able to talk to them and to collaborate with people [...] to be responsible at home with everything that may be needed there. (H/Ed:26/JoTa).

## 9.6 Conclusions

The cultural practices of the rural young peoples of the Colombian Andean high mountain zone make an entangled network of meanings whose interpretation allows one to define, as a conclusion, a thematic dimension where perceptions, among others, are discerned with reference to the quality of life to be reached. The interpretation of these perceptions holds onto the considerations on the quality of life and other related categories that have been approached synthetically at the beginning of this chapter. These interpretations are as follows.

A theoretical look on the quality of life in conjunction with the material and psychosocial environment that allows one to recognize people as “subjects” of a reality about which they also have some knowledge that validates them to engage in social and political, democratic and participative dynamics as well as in activities that deeply promote the respect for human rights (Casas 1999), and, therefore, to be action protagonists (Tonon 2008), are evidenced practically in this research study. As a matter of fact, one of the most important aspects of this research study is the recognition of the young peoples in the Colombian Andean high mountain zone as people who are valid to be consulted, among other aspects, about their perceptions on the rural quality of life and on how to reach it, how to advance towards the achievement of personal and collective goals resulting in those satisfactions, so that they can reach what they consider the ultimate goal which provides them with the maximal satisfaction and moves them closer to happiness.

In this sense, when rural young peoples express critical arguments on the necessity of the presence of the State to guarantee the fulfillment of their rights, they behave as “rural subjects”. And when they acquire their citizen consciousness in that their arguments are taken into account to implement actions and make decisions for

the collective benefit by those who, from the State, have the power to make them in a certain moment, such young peoples behave as “rural social actors” who influence the betterment of their material environment to contribute to guaranteeing better life conditions or social well-being. Now, when they gradually reach the goals imposed that let them better their life conditions and those of the rural community, they pave the road to reach their ultimate goal, that is to be recognized as life examples to be followed by future generations. In this sense, when there is the subjective consciousness that their presence contributes to the psychosocial wellbeing of the members of the rural community, they are provided with satisfactions that move them closer to happiness, the ultimate goal of rural young peoples of the Colombian Andean high mountain zone.

The possible existence of two types of rural young peoples, derived from their occupation in rural work or education, that aim at reaching their ultimate goal in their lives and who consider it as the achievement to “be somebody” in life, it is simply their search for the recognition by the rural community where they are immersed and their own recognition as life examples or models to be followed by future generations. The reaching of this ultimate goal requires reaching other goals that could be short, medium or long-term ones, which gradually move them closer to this purpose. Accordingly, both the young worker and the young student aim at configuring themselves as “rural psychosocial actors” in their daily life. But this search is done through different ways: the worker, through the early integration to society in a kind of social pressing need that consolidates itself through their working bind or through the conformation of a new home; the student, with the postponement of that integration to society until acquiring the training or learning considered as indispensable, in a kind of rural social moratorium.

The attempt to argue, criticize or to propose options, according to their knowledge, to reach the goals aiming at the betterment of their life conditions, configures the rural young peoples of the Colombian Andean high mountain zone as “rural subjects” or people able to have projects, to judge something or somebody positively or negatively, and also to have social relations. These abilities ease the way to their configuration as “rural social actors” but not to their achievement. This happens given the lack of citizen consciousness, which is obtained only when the young peoples perceive they are recognized by the appropriate State authority to implement actions and make decisions taking into account their proposals, that is, when their participation becomes really effective.

Besides, when rural young peoples configure themselves as “rural social actors” or as agents who can contribute to the social wellbeing of their own community, they can go on the way to their configuration as “rural psychosocial actors” or agents able to contribute to the psychosocial wellbeing of their own community. But this configuration, which becomes their ultimate goal or life project, is not consolidated until, besides being perceived by the other members of the community, they perceive themselves as a life example or model to be followed by the members of the rural community where the young peoples coexist day by day, that is, until they acquire the subjective consciousness about this situation.



To move, then, positively along a route on which, short, medium and long-term goals are consolidated by young peoples, one configures them gradually as rural subjects and rural social subjects and ends with the goal which provides the most satisfaction and moves them closer to happiness: to be "rural psychosocial actors". This is a very fundamental goal, which without deciding and without having their actions propose it, their peers in the rural space where they coexist, including their children and the other young peoples' children, interiorize it, appropriate it and try to achieve it. In short, it is a collective, agglutinant and widely shared aspiration of psychosocial change aiming at consolidating a better situation. Accordingly, the rural young peoples' relation with the "others" is not a relation based upon the belonging to the same farm culture or to the same rural society, but an established one with the purpose to become "rural psychosocial actors" in rural life. It is a friendship relation that respects the distance, at the same time that generates communication, a relation that basically consists of considering the other as equal to oneself. It is a relation that, given the satisfactions generated, has positive implications in the community psychosocial wellbeing.

The solid purpose to recognize and to be recognized by the community as life examples and models to be followed by future generations motivates rural young peoples to reach their goals at work or at school. Besides, the desire that their children have "a good future" is not different from the intention to achieve that they also be recognized as life examples of models in their rural community. With this purpose, values such as solidarity, friendship, respect, admiration and care of nature, responsibility at work and at home are transmitted by parents from generation to generation. According to the workers and students' perception, the strong relation between the education level acquired by the parents and that acquired by the children is translated, towards the future, in a relation where the children's level of education is much higher than their parents' due to the desire that their children have a better rural quality of life.

Accordingly, psychosocial wellbeing is represented by the defense that rural young peoples make about their farming culture and about their rural space as a space of comprehension and solidarity. Consequently, when the informants manifest that they live calmly in the village because "we do not have problems with anybody, if we go somewhere we are everybody's friends" or because "the people here are very devoted to their work, they are very united", it reflects the defense of the farming culture which induces them to manifest their refusal to the intention of living elsewhere. This moral defense of the rural area that causes the working young peoples not to abandon the rural environment and that students want to go back home once they have finished their professional studies, is related to the perception that it is possible to enjoy a good rural life there, a satisfactory rural life that integrates social welfare with psychological well-being.

Taking into account the interpretations constructed so far, the quality of young peoples' rural life in the Colombian Andean high mountain zone may be defined as a process through which they propose goals whose gradual achievements allow them to move along a positive way towards the obtaining of a higher or ultimate goal which will provide them with the maximal satisfaction that will move them

nearer to happiness. The achievement of these goals, which are reached when the young peoples configure and exert as rural social subjects and actors, allows them to improve their life conditions, referred to as the satisfaction of needs and the consolidation of their fundamental rights that deal with the lack of property on the land on the part of young peoples, the inexistence of incentives for agricultural production, the need to improve the rural working conditions, access to rural education, lodging and health services. These conditions are considered precarious due to the traditional absence of the State and because they are really inferior with reference to those of young peoples in other contexts. The ultimate goal is reached when, at the moment of evaluating the goals reached in the course of life, there is a satisfaction that will permit these people to recognize themselves or to have the subjective consciousness to be life examples, models or guides to be followed by the new generations.

The rural quality of life is, then, a permanent construction process stimulated by the rural young peoples' aspiration to gain a collective recognition as good people in the Colombian Andean high mountain zone where they are immersed and to acquire the subjective consciousness of such recognition.

For quality of life studies and particularly for those concerning the rural quality of life, qualitative research is important as it presents its results in this chapter and it permits the approach of meaning interpretations that social actors in a determined context give to the daily practices with the aim to improve them. In Latin American countries characterized by social inequality and exclusion and, particularly in countries such as Colombia with the presence of social conflicts derived from this situation for more than 60 years, comprehensive studies on the quality of life that permit one to consolidate tolerance and to reduce discrimination on the basis of respect for differences become a need.

This study highlights the importance of qualitative research. As a matter of fact, the modification of the apathy *ethos* derived from the rural adolescents' formative ability to imitate the molds of the adults' apathy due to "rationalism in progress" that comes along with modernization, and which permits to recognize their unequal position in society, and how it worsens due to the strengthening of economic, commercial and financial globalization which, at the same time, intensifies social inequalities and the concentration of richness and opportunities in the hands of a few. Qualitative research allows one to identify, as in this case, the existence of an adequate sense of social injustice and to understand the just claim for the presence of the State which allows them to train themselves to encounter actions and decisions to reach what they perceive as a good quality of life, and how to consolidate their fundamental rights.

Only when those people who have the capacity and are empowered to make decisions and take actions with reference to the people's quality of life in a highly vulnerable contexts, when there is the want to recognize the inhabitants as valid subjects and actors to be consulted about those matters that they consider are affecting their lives, their families and the rural community's life, the results desired will be achieved. This will permit to reduce social conflicts as it will facilitate, in the possible Colombian post-conflict era, a look at the vulnerable populations such

as the rural young people, rural subjects and social actors, who are to be recognized as valid, listened to and taken into account, by themselves, by the State and by the society.

From the methodological point of view, triangulation becomes a fundamental element in the research process done here. In this sense, the characterization required at the beginning of this study, as in the majority of studies on the quality of life, where reference to the socio-cultural context of the research study and the scenario where the field work takes place, requires the use of the qualitative method. It is also required the use of the quantitative method with its statistical support, given the existence of particular contexts where there is a lack, as in this case, of adequate information previously elaborated.

With reference to the triangulation of the information sources, information resulting from observation, which starts as non-participating information and ends as a participating one; the gathering of secondary information which, for example, from formal theory permits one to construct a theoretical framework that references the study and the primary information derived from the in-depth interviews, makes possible the emergence of the substantive theory represented in the definition of emergent categories such as the "rural quality of life", "rural subject" and "rural social actor", presented in this chapter.

It is also correct to emphasize on the importance of the theoretical triangulation used in this study, as it allows one to approach the theories which, from North America, Western Europe and Latin America, are constructed by contemporary researchers on the quality of life and to define the way to configure Touraine's subject and social actor. Such theories define the way in which the subject is configured and how it transcends to social actor. These approaches and interpretations resulting from the research findings make possible the emergence of categories such as rural quality of life and subcategories such as rural subject, rural social actor and rural psychosocial actor.

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