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## **REPERCUSSIONS OF TEACHING TRAINING IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK IN MEXICO**

### **Abstract**

The labour markets in Mexico are characterised by uncertainty in terms of the lack of work contracts social protection, unemployment, high level of self-employed workers independently and micro-businesses, low income levels, the involuntary part-time working and low levels of unionisation. The all indicate that the labour situation currently reflects many deficiencies in the urban labour markets of Mexico.

Over the two last decades, modest periods of growth and crises have taken place within a strategy of neoliberal development that promotes increased exports and foreign economic investment. Rates of unemployment have stayed low, with the exception of the devaluation crisis of 1995, but our labour markets continue to display very marked weaknesses with regard to occupations and jobs with reasonable income and other suitable conditions of work.

### **Introduction**

The various urban settings, and their importance in demographic, economic and political terms, are reflected in the new aspects of urban labour markets which deserve greater attention nowadays, especially the uncertainty produced by the absence of secure labour contracts and schemes of social protection. There is also unemployment, the extensive use of sub-contractors and micro-businesses, the grey economy, low levels of income, involuntary part-time working and low levels of unionisation. In addition, we must not lose sight of the strategies that promote foreign investment in various forms, industrial assembly plants and the expansion of tourism, as well as the fact that these processes are not well regulated.

### **Background**

Sociology in Mexico came of age in the twentieth century, following theoretical and methodological traditions of national origin, and becoming established in Mexico at the same time as it led Latin America. The process was not simple because there were problems to face at each turn to articulate the scientific way of thinking, from philosophical contributions and paradigms, to the lack of academic discussion and the development of social science in Mexico (Orozco, 2010).

The origins of sociology in Mexico to be found in the positivism of thinkers such as Justo Sierra, José Vasconcelos, Antonio Caso, Manuel Gamio and Andrés Molina Enríquez. However, as the country industrialised and the mass media developed, thinkers like in agreement it advanced the industrialization of the country and the development of mass media arose other thinkers like Samuel Ramos, Manuel Parra and José Iturriaga came to prominence. Although each contributes to

the social range, sociologists Pablo González Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen were particularly important in consolidating the Latin American current.

The history of Mexican sociology is tied to the concept “modernity”. In the interpretation of the history of the country, modernity is one of the elements used to give to sense to the historical events and processes, such as independence, the revolution, the presidencies of Porfirio Díaz and Cardenas, industrialization or the tensions between the State, University, Church, social classes and the society as a whole (Andrade, 2008).

The process of institutionalisation of this social science began in 1875, when Justo Sierra included it in the study programme of Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP) 5. During this period, sociology inclined toward positivism, but the facts were always discussed from a scientific perspective, although socio-economic differences and caste hierarchies, even different levels of competition with castes, were always present.

In the post revolution period, sociology renewed its theoretical and methodological apparatus, because the object of study was not the same; racial mixing is seen as a socio-political benefit for the nation (Vasconcelos, 2000). Problems of modernity and national integration, whether economic, political or social, came to be linked with indigenous cultures, delinquency, alcoholism, poverty, education, ethics, corruption and unemployment.

Because of this questions arise such as: What pressures could bring about changes in ingrained trends? How were trends changed? What were the interests of the groups in power? And who benefited from the changes?

The definition that occurs in the sociology of work is:

*The study of very diverse human groups, according to their size and functions, that are constituted for work, of the reactions they exert on their surroundings on various levels, how the activities of work are constantly remodelled by technical progress, by external relationships among groups, and internal relationships between the individuals that compose them.* (Friedmann, 2007).

### **The definition of the problem**

The Mexican labour market has been characterized by several features that arise because of their evolution and labour conditions.

In the 1990s, there was fluctuating demand for manpower, due to a large extent to an expansion of assembly plants of companies whose main sources of capital were foreign, a situation that has gone into reverse in the last decade. The most recent period has seen reduced demand for our exports, and many of these companies left the country to find cheaper labour, which, together with the lack of legal and fiscal security, encouraged this “mobile capital” to move on. The downturn in external investment led to mass dismissals of personnel, who could not find similar work. These people were absorbed by commerce and the services, which stimulated self-employment and the growth of micro businesses in less than favourable circumstances.

The reorientation of the strategy for economic development, characterised by reduced disposable incomes and greater inequality of incomes, has resulted in more than half the labour force being without access to employment in the early years of the twenty first century.

After the transitory rise in direct foreign investment, the signing of the Free Trade Agreement and the devaluation that took place in the middle of the decade, the growth in manufacturing reduced unemployment substantially.

The difficult economic, political and social conditions of the first decade of the century caused the flow of foreign investment to fall significantly, in addition to which Mexican exports fell, in the face of competition from the Chinese for the market of the United States. In these circumstances a drop in levels of economic activity was particularly marked, especially among women, and there was a reduction in the industrial workforce in certain urban areas (García, 2009).

The city of Mexico continued to lose its character of industrial motor of the nation. The capital city continued to focus on the activities of commerce and services, and the expansion of micro businesses. The changes in other local urban labour markets were linked to a strategy of increasing exports and the substitution of imports.

Over and above the specialization in economic activities, the prevailing conditions of work in a good number of Mexican cities have been characterised by the changes balance between employment of men and women, high unemployment, part-time working, low levels of income, the increasing appearance of micro-industries, employees working without benefits and without remuneration.

The informality of work reflected micro businesses and independent working, or rather an increasing lack of labour regulation in the absence of social benefits.

For these reasons it is interesting to examine the quality of work, or rather the prevailing insecurity in work, as indicated by income, irregular days of work, absence of social protection and contracts of work, for the most part (De la Garza, 2006).

## **Challenges facing Mexico**

### ***Unemployment***

Mexico experienced 80 years of growth in the labour market, under the influence of the population increase, between 1900 and 1980, the latter being the date when stagnation in the creation jobs. This became more marked in the 1990s, when unemployment became quite common, and in the second half of 1992 unemployment in Mexico rose sharply (Cruz, 2002).

Unemployment is the result of irregularities in the applied economic policy, when the economy fails to produce more jobs, higher pay, and improved wages and benefits, guaranteeing improved living conditions for workers and their families.

This produces a vicious cycle in which the lack of public and social policies directed to the improvement of conditions of life of Mexican families makes it impossible for workers to be better educated, so that future generations benefit from better jobs and better pay.

The job shortage produces migration, under employment (the black economy and peripatetic workers), and crime, among other effects. Unemployment nowadays is most evident in two sectors: a) young people, and b) women.

## **Migration**

Migration starts with the need to find work, and occurs in two ways. First there is migration to the urban zones, since even when the countryside provides work, it is not well paid, so people from the country migrate to the city in search of better conditions of life in the city.

Emigration in Mexico occurs among the labourers, and continues to the present day, as one way to find work and secure an income for the family.

Perhaps one of the main reasons for migration is the industrialization of companies, since the price paid for manual work goes down, as machines replace workers. That is to say technology advances and people become ever less necessary to the running of industry, and those people who are needed are well qualified and well educated. This reduces the opportunity for employing more people in this sector.

Migration can represent one option to improve the quality of life, income and qualifications. At the present time 15% of the migrant population is young people. The total migrant population is currently 9.1 million. There are 152 million young people in the world with an income below \$1.25 a day, in spite of having a job (Levy, 2010).

In addition, in recent studies of world-wide unemployment and its relation to the phenomenon of migration, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) calculated that approximately 81 million of the more than 211 million of unemployed (40%) in the world are young people between 15 and 24 years of age. This indicates that the present global economic crisis has hit young people harder than the adult population and has made the labour market situation much worse.

## **Poverty**

Unfairness in the distribution of wealth, unequal ownership of goods and reduced access to social benefits, mean that in the 1990s not enough was done to reduce poverty. Many of the poor are peasants and workers who work for themselves.

Teenage pregnancies are more common among the poor. Rural poverty is most severe among indigenous groups. Poverty not only has economic repercussions, but also has human implications, and produces crime and violence across the country (Iglesias, 2003).

Programmes and projects are needed, accompanied by an integral design that includes the development, execution and supervision with mechanisms to assess and evaluate continuously the impact that initiatives have on poverty. It is important that such programmes engage minority women, children, native peoples and groups, trying to obtain major benefits, since it is these groups that are most likely to be poor.

Investment is needed in education and increasing the quality of education, in the provision of services in health and higher level qualifications, in knowledge of how to obtain major long term benefits, in the reduction of abuses and prevention of violence however they are manifest.

The provision of credit can be complicated and onerous, which limits the investment in high-priority areas such as technological infrastructure, access roads

and communication, the promotion of education and qualifications, and this has an impact on competitiveness and the opening up of new markets.

### ***Technical evolution and technology***

Technical progress and economic progress are reflected clearly in the workplace, where they are expressed in the modification, suppression or addition of positions between manual and non-manual workers in factories and offices. The ease with which those changes can take effect depends partly on the attitudes of workers towards change. That is to say that, nowadays, technological and technical evolution also affects the creation of permanent or temporary employment.

### ***Culture***

Without doubt, culture is fundamental to the way that our country will change in the future, in the way that the economy can support the education of our children, who will direct the future of this country.

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that nowadays the dominant culture of the majority of young people is shaped by organised crime, which disseminates the idea that this is the best way to obtain economic benefits and a good standard of life. As a country, we have not managed to pass on the culture which takes work and an organized, integrated and informed society as the basis for a stable economy, and therefore a better standard of life for the whole nation.

### **Conclusions and prospects**

The sociology of work is an essential part of the science needed to search for a better future for Mexico, in which industrialists, politicians and unions engage in the search for the common good.

Paradoxically, Mexico is characterised by political nepotism, where politicians are more likely to be seen as protagonists in the culture of individualism, evading their responsibilities, denying any blame and amplifying the deficiencies that can be seen in other parts of society in order to justify their own acts.

Culture, tolerance, conscience and the will to engage, on the part of the governors and the governed, promote or decrease usefulness and the outcomes of interventions and socio-economic programmes in a country. A clear example is where Mexico and Brazil have adopted similar economic policies. In Brazil the dedication, disposition and attitude of the citizens have produced the development of "Giant of the South" ("Gigante del Sur"), an example for all Latin America. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same of our nation.

Sadly, Mexico has been transformed into a dependent country in all the senses. Economically and politically we depend on other countries, and socio-political movements are controlled by a powerful minority. We are a society where social groups emerge and create upward pressure, without dependable initiatives, and where the belief is ingrained that the State has an obligation to provide the means for everyone to succeed. Although this belief has some basis in reality, we must recognise that in a country with a population of more than 200 million, the needs are many and at present we are not self-sufficient.

To develop as a country, we need to develop technologically, academically and economically, as individuals and as a society.

At the moment there has been some progress in growing the community of professionals and researchers in universities and of programmes to support study abroad. Although this has produced some productive links, it has been achieved at a high cost, when compared with the cost of developing manpower and professionals internationally. At the same time, the lack of opportunities at home, for diverse reasons, restrains our development.

Investment in education and culture must not be allowed to stagnate, but lack a good planning for the country as a whole means that those who go overseas do not contribute fully. What is needed is a new vision of the state. It is vitally important to involve the private sector and to ensure that the saturation of markets does not affect any part of the productive sector.

The people who have somehow managed to accumulate capital in this country, and/or manage to be in positions of power in society, must use the power which they have in its hands responsibly and repay society. Lamentably, on repeated occasions, this has not happened, and there is widespread distrust of governors and social leaders.

In the circumstances in which we live, the question should not only be: What can Mexico do for the people? But must be: What can the people do for Mexico? How can we solve these social problems?

We need to motivate and stimulate the population, so that it recovers its confidence and its belief in social institutions and leaders, putting the properly qualified people in the appropriate social positions.

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