

## **Vocational styles in family farming. Case study in the province of Guantánamo, Cuba (2021)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Vocational orientation towards the agricultural sector is of interest to different institutions in the world. In Cuba, there are still families that have guaranteed their articulation as a productive unit by incorporating their members to the agricultural activity. The present study aimed to identify the vocational styles of one of these families in the municipality of El Salvador. The descriptive-qualitative research used the case study through five semi-structured individual interviews and the familiograma. The vocational styles of the family investigated are of a tolerant and rational type, mediated by factors both internal and external to the family.

**Keywords:** Vocational training; Career guidance; Vocational guidance; Family units of agricultural production; Social reproduction strategies; Peasantry; Local development

### **Introduction**

The orientation towards a profession is a systematic, constant, progressive work that does not begin when the subject is at the doors of the selection process, but when the person

begins to shape the conception of the world and the relationship with trades and professions.

The necessary vocational training and professional orientation is not only exercised by the school institution but also by the family, which educates, reinforces, complements or rejects. The family is irreplaceable as the primary agency for the construction of identity and the main space for interaction. These purposes legitimize its necessity as a reproductive and creative institution of a culture within the limits of an existing social order.

The agricultural sector is of strategic importance in the agenda for the socioeconomic development of the country; it is one of the main sources of employment and a sector whose growth has a major impact on the reduction of poverty and the eradication of hunger. Family farming occupies a prominent place in this sector.

At the national level, Bombino (2018) examined university educational policies from 2000 to 2015, with emphasis on agricultural careers, showing that, although strategies have been created to motivate the study of such careers, the necessary changes have not occurred that would make the sector an attractive employment offer for the population in general and in particular, to young people. This author states that “(...) in spite of these intentions, the levels of entry to agricultural careers are far below the professional needs of the territories and the supply of careers (...)” (p. 189).

In this regard, several studies have referred to this phenomenon from different points of view and institutions; without delving into the role played by the family in this process (Revé & Cuenca, 2020; Crespo, Santamaría & Hernández, 2021; Arango & Ramos, 2021; Delgado & Mosqueda, 2024). However, it is worth noting the research that has considered that the family is the socialization agent with the greatest influence on the vocational formation and professional orientation of adolescents (Batista, 2017; Rodríguez, 2019; Gómez, 2020; Delvia, 2022; Martínez, 2022).

The literature review conducted revealed the scarcity of Cuban studies that have delved into the processes of vocational formation and professional orientation in family farmers from the sociological perspective in Cuba. This research focused on the family agricultural production unit (UFPA), a unit of collective action that reproduces itself in a given cultural, social and economic scenario. In the municipality of El Salvador, Guantánamo province, in spite of the limitations, there are families that apply vocational

training and professional orientation practices, articulate around work on the farm and dignify agricultural work as a means of livelihood for their offspring.

The approach to this phenomenon from the general theories in Sociology was carried out with the structuralist constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu on social reproduction strategies, to interpret the set of strategies through which the family seeks to reproduce the properties that allow it to preserve its social position (Bourdieu, 2011; Batista, Leyva & Riera, 2023). From the special theories, the phenomenon was analyzed from the sociology of the family, emphasizing the educational function of the family (Álvarez, 2001; Fleitas, 2010). Finally, the particular theory of vocational styles by Batista (2017) was used.

It is of interest for sociology and for the educational sciences to understand the forms used by these families to orient or form, especially in those that have guaranteed their articulation as a productive unit by incorporating their members into this work for generations, even as a complement or main source of income for many. The educational function of the family is key and within it, the practices for vocational training and professional guidance, that is, vocational styles (Batista, 2017). Its identification is crucial for the work done in schools at various levels of education and the accompaniment of the family in these processes, in turn; it is constituted as a referent of social action.

The above analysis leads to the following question: what are the vocational styles of the selected agricultural production family unit in the municipality of El Salvador? The general objective is to identify the vocational styles of the selected agricultural production family unit in the municipality of El Salvador.

## **Development**

In order to obtain the data in this research, a descriptive qualitative approach was used, which allowed understanding the management of social practices of the UFPA, exploring the perspective of the participants in a natural environment, identifying their relationships and dynamic structure. It was conducted in two stages, beginning with the literature review, the definition of the case and the collection of empirical information, and finally, the results were analyzed and the report was written.

The case study was useful to obtain life stories of the UFPA within the context in which they operate, allowing identifying, describing, understanding and explaining the phenomenon under study as complex dynamics in specific contexts.

As part of this method, an individual semi-structured interview was used, applied to five members of the UFPA located in the municipality of El Salvador, a family that is a reference for the results it has demonstrated throughout its family trajectory, both in agricultural production and in the fulfillment of its educational function. This technique was applied with the objective of corroborating the vocational styles of the family members and the influence it had on their descendants. For this purpose, purposive opinion sampling was used, based on the following case selection criteria: family located in the municipality of El Salvador, province of Guantánamo; more than 10 years in agricultural activity; with three or more residential units; that incorporate their members in agricultural activity.

The familiogram (Compañ, Feixas, Muñoz & Montesano, 2012; Batista, 2021) was used for the analysis, visualization of the structure and composition of the complete UFPA, its residential units and its relationship with the land.

### **Characterization of the UFPA**

In this analysis, it is necessary to start from the characteristics of a family production unit. The selected case fits the definition of UFPA provided by (Batista, 2020, pp. 49-50).

The selected family unit comes from the Caujerí Valley, San Antonio del Sur municipality, Guantánamo province, where they were engaged in agricultural work. In 2004, they decided to move to the municipality of El Salvador, taking advantage of opportunities to improve access to basic services provided by the policies of the time. They joined a Credit and Service Cooperative with the fundamental line of production: fruit trees and various crops.

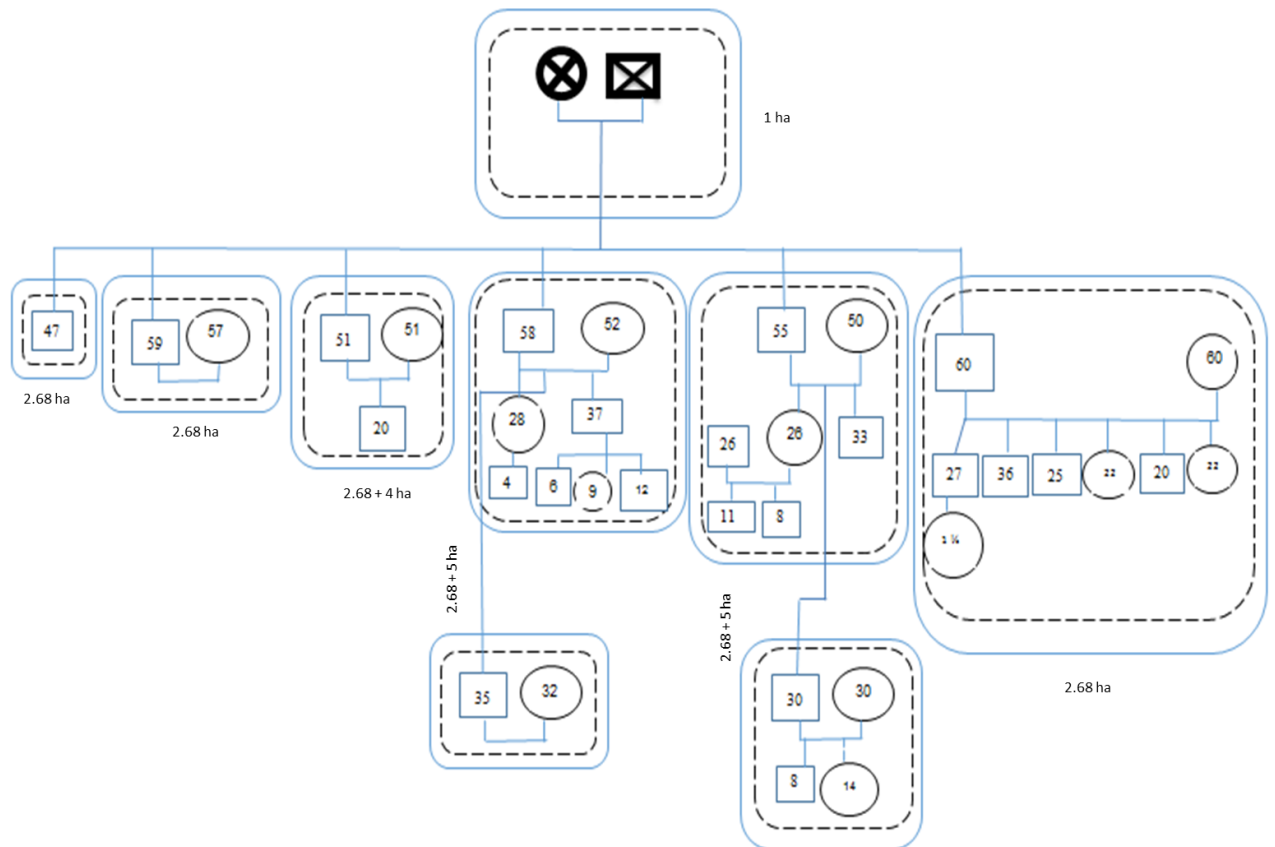
The farm has a single property with a perimeter of 22.14 hectares (ha), divided into 8 residential units (9 houses), one of which measures 1 ha and the others 2.68 ha, plus 4 and 5 ha that some members have requested in usufruct (Figure 1). It should be clarified that this division does not mean separation of farm work; on the contrary, it is carried out collectively, generally using the family labor force.

It is composed of consanguineous kinship ties organized by the following kinship lines: in the ascending straight line are the parents (already deceased), in the descending straight

line are the 6 children, with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In addition, the consanguineous link includes the daughters-in-law and a stepdaughter (not shown in the figure). In total, 36 members were counted, therefore, it classifies as a large UFPA.

Among the eight residential units, in nine dwellings and plots, of this UFPA, differences were found in terms of the stages of the family-farm life cycle (F-FLC-F), family types and the possibility of family replacement (Batista, 2021).

Source: Self elaboration (2021)



**Figure 1.** Familiogram of the UFPA studied (2021)

Most of the women in the family have a triple workday: they work outside the house, do domestic chores at home and work directly in the fields, tend to the animals, participate in planting and harvesting, especially chickpeas and tomatoes. The empowerment that these women have had after the triumph of the Revolution, allowed them to participate in other organizations and institutions, in the assignment of roles, in the access, autonomy and control of the farm's resources. We can say that in this UFPA the contribution of women has been significant if we take into account their multifaceted character, since they work between domestic tasks, care and professional work.

At the call of the Minister of Agriculture in Cuba, it should be noted that this family made significant contributions to the basic food basket, when this country was in the most critical moments of the health crisis caused by Covid-19. They actively participated in the contingency to guarantee the operation of the different production systems, with emphasis on the municipal self-sufficiency program. They made donations to isolation centers, with contributions in physical production and 300 quintals of mango for the industry.

This farm carried out sustainable land management, especially with its incorporation to the project<sup>1</sup> that consists of creating a fruit forest that protects the land to contribute to climate change. In 2019, this project granted recognition to the brothers of this family for having achieved the category of “Area initiated in sustainable land management”, until that moment, such distinction had only been achieved by five producers in Cuba.

### **Vocational styles of the UFPA studied.**

In Guantánamo, Cuba's easternmost province where this sector is key to its economy, the demand for agricultural careers often does not cover the supply. It is observed that the youth, and specifically the peasants, opted for other sources of employment, which contributed to the migration from the mountains to the plains. Likewise, it can be observed that careers in the health sector were in demand, unlike those of the agricultural profile which, despite the adjustments in educational policies aimed at promoting opportunities for access to agricultural careers at the technical-professional and higher education levels, the levels of entry to these careers are below the professional needs and the supply of careers.

Although there is political will on the part of the Cuban State to dignify agricultural work and family production units, there is still insufficient recognition of these trades and careers by a network of social actors who are involved in influencing the choice of profession, especially among adolescents, including the school, the family, groups of friends, cultural institutions and the mass media.

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<sup>1</sup>Country partnership program on sustainable land management in support of the implementation of the national program to combat desertification and drought, integrated by: The Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA), Environment Agency (AMA), The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and The United Nations (UN).

These characteristics of the context and such structure of opportunities are added, on the one hand, to the labeled image given to the agricultural producer, the forced labor required, the distances, the transportation, the technological obsolescence of this activity and, on the other hand, the youth aspirations oriented to professions and urban life project. In the contradictory expression between supply and demand of careers in the agricultural profile with respect to careers in the health sector and others of a social nature, the role of the family in the process of vocational training in coherence with the needs and strategies of life stands out.

In the family as a social institution that reproduces the norms, patterns, traditions, customs and values of peasant life, it is possible to connect the field related to family agricultural production with the habitus that generates practices in daily life, in order to understand the main structural processes that at an objective and subjective level influence the daily reproduction of styles of professional orientation and vocational training in the new generations.

This is manifested in the history of a UFPA that has been able to replace itself by carrying out the functions and needs of its CVF-F for generations around the agricultural activity. The analysis presented here was divided into two generations.

➤ **First generation of the UFPA**

This generation was started by the parents who were born in the 30's. They had 6 sons (60's and 70's), in San Antonio del Sur. In 2004 they moved to a farm in the municipality of El Salvador.

Although this generation lived in the mountainous rural area far from the town, their parents were concerned about their children's discipline and academic performance, and guaranteed their attendance to educational institutions. They helped them, as far as they could, in the completion of their school homework. The father was illiterate and the mother reached the 6th grade, due to the occupation and possibilities of her family of origin:

(...) my grandfather was a person of possibilities, owner of a bakery and stores, who paid teachers to teach my mother to read, write, that is, the basics (...) (Fragment of the interviews).

The parents did not have studies due to the times they had to live in, due to the fact that education was an unattainable dream for poor families before the triumph of the Revolution<sup>2</sup>.

Although schools were created, only those families who lived in the cities and could afford to pay for their children's education enjoyed this benefit, thus exempting low-income families located in rural areas. In addition to their illiteracy, they did not enter institutions in charge of supporting vocational orientation. These educational policies and structure of opportunities were unaffordable for the parents of this generation, so they educated their children according to their beliefs, traditions and interests, lacking sufficient information about the object of study of the various professions and trades to guide their children.

As a consequence, Figure 2 shows that one of the eight members of this generation graduated in Agricultural Engineering, the rest only reached 12 degrees, so they all worked in the fields. In this case, all the descendants were male, a characteristic that facilitated and reaffirmed their orientation towards farm work. The parents assumed without coercion the decisions of their children to continue their studies or not, that is to say, they did not impose on them the study of a career or a trade. This shows us that these children continued the tradition that comes from the generation of their great-great-grandparents who dedicated their entire lives to work in the fields, a lifestyle that was instilled unconsciously by performing or relating daily with agricultural work.

(...) we were born in a peasant kingdom, and all our lives we have been working the land, a custom that my parents, who have already passed away, sowed in us, but we continue the tradition (...) (Fragment of the interviews).

According to the context in which they lived, the limited structure of opportunities, the family tradition of working in the fields and the little benefit of the policies approved by the government at the time, influenced the parents of this generation to unconsciously assume a tolerant style towards their children, allowing them to decide whether or not to study a career or trade, with an absence of coercion, or at least explicit intervention.

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<sup>2</sup>In spite of the fact that Cuba became a member of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1939, it joined the National Plan and signed the Mexico Resolution in 1946, where priority was given only to those professions and trades that incorporated greater economic benefits and real possibilities of socio-economic development of the country as a mono-economy. (sugar cane) (mechanical, agricultural, technical education, agronomy, legal, agricultural, commercial, medical and others) (Rodríguez, 1983, p. 25).

In the tolerant style assumed, the parents' concern for academic performance, disciplines, as well as the behaviors assumed by the tutors regarding the career chosen by their children stand out.

➤ **Second generation of the UFPA**

This generation is composed of grandsons and granddaughters, between 22 and 37 years of age, born between 1984 and 1999 in the Caujerí Valley. Their parents' ages range from 51 to 60 years old. They also exchanged with the first generation in 2004 for a farm in the municipality of El Salvador, where they are currently located.

The parents of this generation were concerned that their children would maintain good academic performance and attend school despite the distance, sometimes relying on a family member.

The parents of this generation, despite the fact that most of them have a 12th grade level of schooling, have guided them in the process of professional orientation, which, unlike the parents of the first generation, have had the support of government policies and a broader and more varied opportunity structure, which also made teachers and professors responsible for the orientation towards the most necessary professions.

In 2000, with the Third Educational Revolution, capacities for schools of various types and specializations<sup>3</sup> were offered. Since the Resolution of the Ministry of Education (2009) No. 306/2009 (p. 11), which establishes that the student and the parent or guardian, must sign the ballot given for the continuity of studies, because with it the student will choose the career to study and gives the family legal responsibility and protagonism in supporting their children in this important decision. With this resolution, the Government reaffirms assigns and opens numerous institutions that serve to guide the family in the process of vocational training and professional orientation. As a result of these opportunities, the diversity of careers studied included incursions outside the agricultural sector (Figure 2).

(...) one day I found out that there was going to be an aptitude test in pre-no. 8 to study the career and I grabbed my daughter and put her in the car (...). (Fragment of the interviews).

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<sup>3</sup>Such as the Comprehensive Preparation Course for Disengaged Youth, the School of Art Instructors, the Emerging Qualification of Primary Teachers, Comprehensive Teacher of Basic Secondary Education, Emerging Nursing and Training of Social Workers (Matos, 2003, p. 3).

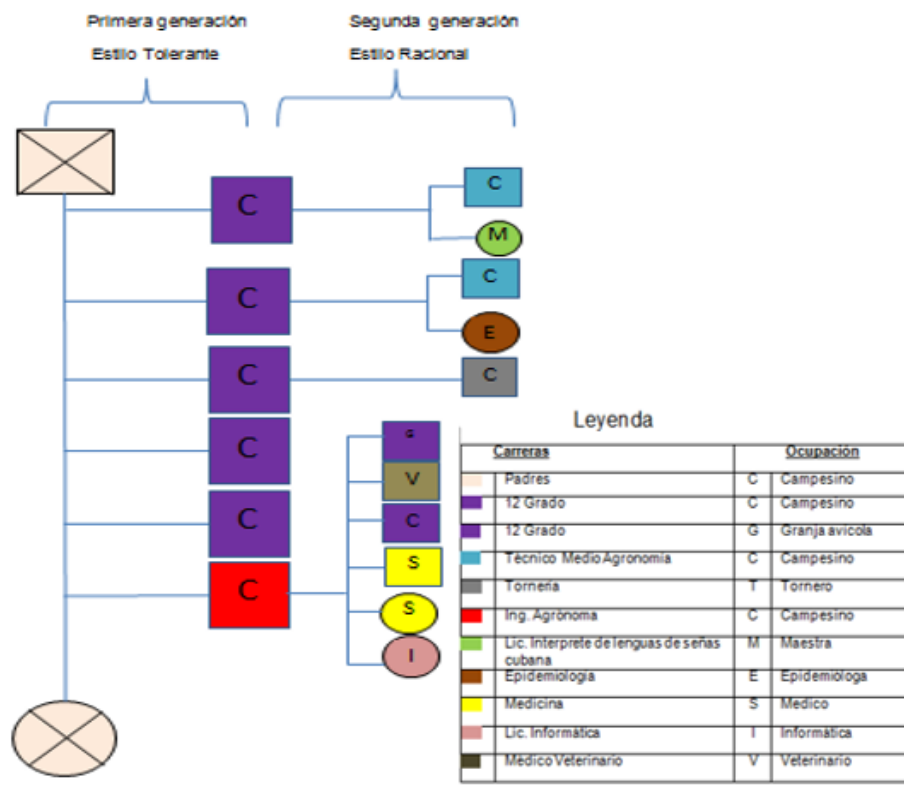
It is evident that the context in which this generation lived and the possibilities of study diversity is more attractive than in the first generation. The tutors talked and supported their children taking into account the real possibilities they had to perform the desired career and about their attitudes towards it. It was identified that they assumed a rational style because with greater awareness they guided their offspring to incline towards careers and trades other than the one they practiced, based on the conditions of the environment that offered better opportunities than in their time. The scheme of thought that associates females outside of farm work was manifested by guiding the four females to study careers outside this sector and the descendants who were mainly dedicated to the agricultural activity of the farm were males. This reveals the reproduction of these gender stereotypes.

(...) when I was old enough to study for a career, my parents encouraged me to study so that I would be a professional and not a housewife or work in the fields (...). (Fragment of the interviews).

It should be clarified that, although there was a greater diversity of careers studied and trades practiced outside the agricultural profile and residing in the city, the members who made such decisions continued to collaborate in their free time with agricultural work. The pluriactivity and the knowledge acquired in these diverse professions and a trade, far from altering its unity, enriches it. This UFPA has evolved in terms of composition, organization and social reproduction, since in the first generation there was only one trade, agricultural activity, and in the second generation there is a diversification of careers and workplaces, but without ceasing to constitute a productive unit. This relationship of family cooperation is the result of the process of intergenerational socialization from an early age with agricultural work.

In the rational style assumed, the parents' concern for the academic performance, the student's discipline, the interest in the improvement of the parents' school level, the parents' knowledge about the vocational orientation process and the opportunities for continuity of studies stand out, the observation of their children's behavior in order to have clarity regarding the profession for which they may be suitable considering the sex of their children, the information provided to the student about the object of study of the different professions and trades according to sex, as well as the behavior assumed by the parents regarding the career chosen by their children.

Source: Self elaboration (2021)



**Figure 2.** Relationship between vocations, careers or level of education and occupations by generations in the UFPA studied (2021)

Although towards the first generation they opted for a tolerant style, they reproduced forms of composition and organization linked to the productive activity, on the basis of cooperation, in function also of the contribution to food production, knowledge, experiences and habits, which were sources of values and symbols of culture towards their descendants, socializing them for work in the field; thus they achieved positive results in terms of their social reproduction for the continuity of the family as an agricultural production unit.

In the second generation, the diversity of careers studied by its members stands out, with the predominance of a rational style, which in comparison with the first generation also achieved the reproduction of the family as an agricultural production unit. Factors such as the sense of belonging and social recognition, family cooperation, the location of the farm close to urban areas, as well as the benefits perceived by each member with respect to the productive activity, which reinforces the interest in maintaining the link in one way or another, also played a role in this.

The size of this UFPA is another characteristic that favored its social reproduction, since the occupation of some members in other sectors does not threaten this capacity, as they

have sufficient replacement. The parents were able to ensure that while some of their descendants studied careers and trades that surpassed them in terms of education, even if they were alien to the agricultural profile, others dedicated themselves to this work. This reaffirms the position and effectiveness of educational strategies aimed at vocational guidance as part of their educational function.

## **Conclusions**

This study identified the vocational styles of the selected agricultural production family unit in the municipality of El Salvador, through the introduction from the sociological perspective of the fundamental role of the family for professional orientation and vocational training with their offspring.

The sociological framework elaborated allowed understanding that the predominant vocational styles of the agricultural production family unit in the municipality of El Salvador are of the tolerant and rational type. The vocational styles applied by the family have an impact on the professional orientation and vocational training of their offspring, contributing to their inclination towards a profession or trade.

The strategies used by this UFPA were effective; intergenerational socialization was carried out from a very early age to achieve social reproduction and maintain the continuity of the family as an agricultural production unit.

Differences were identified between the generations of the UFPA, in terms of the vocational styles applied in each generation, corresponding to the educational level, the parents' knowledge of the vocational orientation process linked to the family's educational function, the interests manifested in their strategies, the structure of opportunities and the policies applied that served as a context in each generation.