

Chapter 2

Residential Settlement and Mobility in the San Quintin Valley: Methodological Reflections on an Interdisciplinary Study

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Abstract This chapter examines the settlement and mobility practices of farm-workers and families in the San Quintin Valley in Baja California, Mexico from a multi- and interdisciplinary perspective. Its goal is to open the ‘black box’ of interdisciplinary collaboration as research praxis to expose its nuts and bolts. The praxis of interdisciplinary research can be conceptualized as a process consisting of different stages requiring various approaches and research strategies. Each stage poses a distinct set of challenges but also presents opportunities for enhancing dialogue across disciplines. Interdisciplinary research means both specialization and defocalization, with each of these logics dominating in a different way at the stages of theoretical conceptualization and methodological construction examined.

Keywords Interdisciplinary research • Research methodology • Settlement • Baja California • San Quintin Valley

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2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological experience in a multi- and interdisciplinary study on the settlement process of laborers and families in San Quintin Valley since the 1980s.¹ Located in the state of Baja California, Mexico, some 300 km south of the US border, San Quintin Valley is one of the most economically dynamic rural regions of northwestern Mexico, thanks to its specialized export-oriented agricultural production of fresh vegetables for the US and Canadian markets. Since the 1970s, growth in the horticulture export sector has fostered an increasing demand for field workers in the region, leading to a gradual but solid transformation in labor composition from migratory laborers residing in camp settlements and in constant movement, to laborers settled in *colonias*—subdivisions of land lots where settlers have built their own homes—with more stable employment opportunities. We refer to this residential shift from camps to *colonias* as settlement, with important implications for family and labor life and for the constitution of the local and regional community.

At the regional level, settlement has led to notable demographic consequences, including the population growth registered in recent decades. Between 1990 and 2010, the population of the San Quintin Valley more than doubled, jumping from 38,151 to 92,177 inhabitants.² Given the new pattern of residence in *colonias*, the traditional agricultural camps where farm workers were generally located have decreased in size, and some have disappeared. In their place, a large number of recently forming *colonias* have been emerging, with agricultural workers and their families building their own housing, creating new forms of employment, developing new local communities, and gradually establishing roots in the region. Residential settlement, however, did not lead to the end of migratory mobility in the region; on the contrary, it fostered new forms of geographic mobility and migratory patterns. This process of mobility-settlement-mobility is characteristic of the border region between Mexico and the United States, reflecting a global phenomenon of simultaneous human migrations and settlement processes.

With the objective of studying residence and mobility as constitutive aspects of this settlement experience, we decided from the outset to apply an interdisciplinary approach that would allow us to capture the richness and complexity of this process, which has profoundly transformed the region in the last decades. Methodologically, the interdisciplinary and teamwork approach promised better conditions than an approach based on a single discipline to confront the challenge of achieving a comprehensive understanding of settlement and its consequences.

¹ The study presented is part of a larger project “Migración, Trabajo Agrícola y Etnicidad” (Migration, Farm Labor, and Ethnicity) conducted in Baja California funded by Conacyt and El Colef in Mexico. Ethnographic research was also funded by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the National Science Foundation.

² Elaboration of the El Colef-Conacyt project, based on the General Censuses of Population and Housing, 1990 to 2010.



Welcome to San Quintin Valley, Baja California, Mexico. *Source* Photo by Abbdel Camargo who granted permission to reproduce this photo



Mayordomía handing over in Nuevo San Juan Copala, San Quintin Valley, Baja California, Mexico. *Source* Photo by Abbdel Camargo who granted permission to reproduce this photo

With the purpose of giving an account of the new residential forms and the changes in migratory flows to the region, we decided to combine three disciplinary approaches: demography for studying the interactions between demographic and residential dynamics; sociology for studying the collective action associated with new residences and its consequences in the social integration processes; and anthropology for documenting this process from the perspective of the laborers and families who are the protagonists of settlement.

Following Smelser (2003), we define interdisciplinarity as the collaboration and synergy among researchers from distinct disciplines who converge with different focuses, concepts, and perspectives in the comprehension of a determined social

phenomenon. From this perspective, our intention is to go beyond the mere sum of empirical results arising from diverse disciplines and methods. We aim to pursue interdisciplinary dialogue that can lead to a critical review and formulation of new concepts and theories pertinent to the research topic.

Fortunately, we are not starting from zero in this undertaking. The academic literature covering the epistemological and theoretical basis upon which interdisciplinary research is conducted is of great value. Examples in interdisciplinary research can be found in fields such as international migration, ethnic, and gender studies, which have all developed on the basis of cross-disciplinary fertilization. Yet there is scarce reflection and discussion about the praxis of interdisciplinary research and the challenges that collaboration across disciplines entails. We specifically refer to the praxis of interdisciplinary research as process, the different stages an interdisciplinary project involves, the set of challenges each stage presents, and the research strategies available to respond to them.

The objective of this chapter is to contribute to reflection on this matter based on our experience of interdisciplinary collaboration in the study of the above referred settlement process in the San Quintin Valley. Generally, scholars who form part of a research team possess experience around a specific theme and have studied a particular discipline, developing a certain degree of dominion of theoretical knowledge and specialization in determined methodologies and techniques. Yet at the same time, this specialization often becomes a straitjacket, inhibiting interaction and the generation of shared knowledge among researchers with distinct themes and disciplines when they take part in joint projects, as is our case.³ Throughout the project, we realized that interdisciplinarity required a certain degree of disciplinary defocalization in order to facilitate comprehension of the logics of reasoning, basic variables and parameters, theoretical assumptions, and methodologies employed by other 'specialists'.

The argument we present here is that interdisciplinary research implies both specialization and defocalization, with the crossing of disciplinary borders. Each of these logics dominates in a different way in the conceptualization phase and in methodological construction. Thus we view interdisciplinary research as a process made up of distinct phases including: (1) conceptual design of the project, (2) selection of study methods and techniques, (3) collection of data and information, (4) analysis and interpretation, and (5) write up and presentation of results. Distinct possibilities exist in each of these phases, as well as challenges, advantages, and disadvantages for the interdisciplinary encounter, compelling the

³ In our research team, each member has not only a different disciplinary education, but also specializes in different areas of knowledge. The sociologist, Laura Velasco, focuses on studies of migration and identity processes, particularly of indigenous populations from Oaxaca migrating to destinations along the northwestern Mexican and southwestern US border regions. The demographer, Marie Laure Coubès, has studied employment along the northern Mexican border, particularly gender differences in labor markets and labor trajectories. The anthropologist, Christian Zolniski, specializes in issues of labor and migration, particularly with respect to Mexican immigrant workers and communities in the United States.

research team to make some strategic decisions. We believe that a discussion of the challenges that each of these stages entails is a necessary step for researchers who aspire to overcome the disciplinary barriers that often prevent truly interdisciplinary teamwork.

In this chapter we present only the first two phases of our research. The first section addresses the conceptual design of our study, its objectives, disciplinary approaches, hypotheses, and levels of analysis. We discuss the experience of developing concepts that resonate across different disciplines, and how we built upon the theoretical corpus of each of them. In the second section, we describe the project's methodological design and the research techniques selected to respond to the multidisciplinary construction of the project.

2.2 Conceptual Design: The Study of Settlement from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

Our initial interest was to understand the transformations occurring in the region during the last two decades, particularly the process of residential settlement of thousands of laborers and their families in the region. This phenomenon contrasted with the image of San Quintin—still present in the literature of the 1990s—as a region of seasonal migrants. One of our first challenges then was to conceptualize the various aspects that characterize this residential settlement process. We defined settlement as a demographic and social process through which a high proportion of agricultural workers made this region their place of residence, changing from seasonal migrants to residents with ties and a sense of belonging to a local and regional community without implying the end of their geographic mobility.

In order to understand how residential settlement emerged, we also considered other transformations in the larger region's economy. The San Quintin Valley's recent history presents a clear illustration of how the articulation between global and regional forces has fostered formidable economic and demographic growth in this arid region which, prior to the 1980s, was scarcely populated. Growing demand for horticultural products in the US market, as well as the flow of capital south of the border and the relocation of numerous export-agriculture sector consortiums to the San Quintin region have contributed to sparking this region's soaring economic growth.

In this context, our aim was to study the new residential and mobility patterns that such macro-structural transformations have engendered, and the ways in which individuals and collectives respond and frame their options for action. Statistical and qualitative data indicate that a large segment of the region's inhabitants have experienced residential change from camps for laborers residing in the area only temporarily, to low-income *colonias*. For example, the proportion of agricultural laborers residing in camps during the high season dropped from two-thirds to one-third between 1989 and 1999 (INI/PRONJAG, cited by Velasco

2002, p. 71), and in the 1990s 20 new *colonias* were created.⁴ These changes have been accompanied by social differentiation in labor and ethnic terms. A large number of the new settlers are no longer as vulnerable to the changing agricultural seasons, since agricultural employment has extended throughout more months during the year. In addition, population growth has fostered the development of employment possibilities in other sectors such as services and regional commerce, contributing to the increasing diversification of the region's labor markets. There has also been increasing ethnic differentiation of the migrants arriving in the San Quintin Valley, including Mixtecs, Triquis, Zapotecs, and Purépechas, as well as mestizo workers who come from states such as Sonora and participate at a different point in the production process.

In the context of these changes, we seek to examine the residential and mobility dimensions associated with settlement from an interdisciplinary articulation at both the conceptual and methodological levels. We begin with the premise that settlement should be addressed as a diachronic process that develops in stages over time, involving important transformations at both the macro level in the region's demographic structure and in meso-implications for the families and domestic units that are the subject of settlement. With the objective of capturing these distinct levels, our proposal consists of combining different approaches from various disciplines with regard to the concept of settlement.

Specifically we approach the settlement experience in the San Quintin Valley from two different and complimentary angles: as a colonization endeavor, and as a social integration process. In one of its primary meanings, the concept of settlement has been used by historians and human geographers to refer to the process of colonization of scarcely populated areas by new settlers who migrate from other regions and who contribute to its economic development. In this sense, the concept of settlement is closely linked to the idea of settlers as *pioneer agents* who contribute to opening up, populating, and developing new regions in bordering/peripheral locations which, due to their geographic, climatic, or political characteristics, had been scarcely developed. These pioneer agents may establish themselves in previously uninhabited territories or may join settlements already established by earlier inhabitants.

The notion of colonization as the organizer of settlement has been developed by geographers, who have proposed a theoretical model of urban systems resulting from this process (Whebell 1969). The settlement resulting from colonization is represented by the corridor model, which serves as a transportation axis that shapes residential settlement along this axis. In this sense, the history of San Quintin's development includes various elements of this corridor model. San Quintin is located in a long plain area, connected to the cities of the north by the trans-peninsular highway. This transportation axis has played a key role in the development and distribution of its main settlement points and the expansion of its economic relations with cities in the north as well as in California. Settlement in

⁴ Elaboration of the El Colef-Conacyt project based on Observación de colonias.

this region is thus organized in different staggered locations located along the highway axis. The economy, almost exclusively oriented toward exportation, is also an important element of this colonization model.

The concept of colonization also has a long tradition in studies about the history of economic development in the southwestern United States and its border region with Mexico since the mid-nineteenth century. For example, some historians have used this concept to outline the slow colonization process in the state of Baja California. The first projects to develop large-scale commercial agriculture in the peninsula took place in the late nineteenth century during the Porfiriato regime spearheaded by various national and foreign companies; however, in the San Quintin Valley these projects failed (Piñera 2006; Taylor 2011). On the threshold of the twentieth century, Mexicali emerged as the first and largest agricultural enclave in Baja California in the Colorado River Delta (Deasy and Gerhard 1944, p. 584). This development reflected a broader historic process through which the Mexican state began to promote large agricultural irrigation projects, especially for cotton production, along the country's northern border.

The San Quintin Valley, however, can be seen as a case of late colonization in one of the northern Mexico border regions which had remained outside of the border's economic development, was scarcely inhabited, and where the state had a weak presence. As such it shares similar traits with, and also offers important contrasts to, the previous experiences of colonization in Mexicali and other northern border regions. In all the cases, colonization was a result of export-oriented commercial agriculture development projects first around cotton in the first half of the twentieth century, and then around vegetable production beginning in the 1970s. Thus it was not until the 1970s when the San Quintin Valley began to take off economically and demographically, stimulated by the development of export agriculture, especially tomato production. This growth was also facilitated by the construction of the trans-peninsular highway connecting the region to the Tijuana-San Diego border. In this undertaking, the Mexican state sought to develop this border region with the objectives of providing sources of employment, populating the region, and fomenting the export-agriculture industry by seizing upon the natural advantages of geographic proximity with the US market.⁵

Unlike the large irrigation projects constructed in Mexicali and other regions of northern Mexico, however, state investment in infrastructure in the San Quintin Valley was scarce. The initiative for promoting the agro-export sector was left in the hands of private investors, particularly US companies, through commercial alliances with local producers. In this sense, the state makes its appearance late in the region's history, most visibly in the 1980s, both to bring order to the massive population process unleashed by economic growth and to mediate labor disputes between producers and laborers in a climate marked by high levels of social

⁵ For a discussion of the growth of the export-oriented horticultural industry in Mexico and its role in fomenting massive forms of labor migration and flexible employment, see Lara Flores (2010) and Lara Flores and de Grammont (2011).

inequality and conflict. The state then became a central actor in the distribution of lands for *colonias* in which agricultural workers and their families gradually settled, the regularization of property rights, the installation of certain basic services and infrastructure for these recently-formed *colonias*, and the development of assistance programs for alleviating the problems related to poverty, hygiene, and public health that began to ravage the indigenous agricultural worker population.

In short, the San Quintin Valley illustrates a case of late economic development directly linked to the globalization process of the export-agriculture sector (Zloliniski 2010). As such, it poses a number of questions: How did the transition from agricultural camps to *colonias* take place in this colonization endeavor? How has the demographic and ethnic profile of the Valley's population transformed? And how have the new settlers developed a sense of belonging and community in this region? To answer these questions we felt we needed to look beyond the concept of colonization explained above to capture the social mechanisms by which individuals and collective groups set up roots in the region and mobilize to advance their rights as settlers. Next we turn our attention to a second approach to settlement that addresses the economic, social, and political dimensions of this process.

2.2.1 Socio-Economic and Political Integration

The concept of settlement also has a long-standing tradition in sociology and social anthropology. In these disciplines, this concept is often used to refer to the mechanisms, strategies, and collective actions through which new inhabitants, generally immigrants, attempt to incorporate and integrate within a new social and political context. In the field of migration studies, the notion of settlement as incorporation within the receiving society is a tool that has been used widely. Particularly in the studies on Mexican migration to rural California in the 1980s, the concept of settlement was used to distinguish between migrants (sojourners) and settlers (Chávez 1988, p. 105; Cornelius 1992, p. 187), pointing out an important change in the living conditions and the vital orientation of migrants once they achieve a stable residence.

While recognizing the contribution of these studies to the documentation of the settlement experience of Mexican immigrants in California, it is important to challenge the dichotomy implied in the distinction between these two types of immigrants. Viewing settlement from the biographic perspective of the individual or the family, the new residence does not necessarily inhibit the mobility of the individual or other family members. Instead it may actually facilitate or foment geographic and migratory mobility. According to Rouse (1992, p. 43), while a process of stability for some members of the family exists, this same condition extends to others the possibility of continuing in movement, developing a type of bifocality in the residential settlement process that combines with the establishment of trans-territorial or transnational circuits. This simultaneous and multiple reality has been recognized as one of the premises of the transnational migration

model, exhibiting the intermingling of integration practices in the new places of residence with those of transnational or translocal linkage, as well as the coexistence of links with places of origin and other locations in the migratory circuits at the family and community levels (see Levitt et al. 2003, p. 571).⁶ In this perspective, family life is not limited to the local sphere, but may take on a trans-territorial or transnational tone, depending on the places in which family members are located. This creates a situation in which what happens in one region, such as California or Oaxaca, has implications for individuals residing in other regions, such as San Quintin.⁷

In our theoretical model on settlement there is then a conceptual connection between mobility and residential establishment by formerly migrant workers. Mobility is at the origin, since the process of demographic growth in the region was in large extent the result of the arrival of the pioneer settlers and thousands of workers and their families. But once these migrants settled, establishing residence in the region, new forms of mobility and migration appeared. This makes the San Quintin Valley a point of both arrival and departure, in which internal and international migration intersect.

Thus both residential stability and geographic mobility reflect the above-mentioned bifocality. Placing this phenomenon in historic and social perspective, we decided to conceptualize settlement not only as the development of a rural region inhabited by businesspeople, ranchers, and laborers, but also characterized by the emergence of new regional actors, new forms of identity, and new processes for establishing roots linked to the significant changes in forms of residence.⁸ Hence in the San Quintin Valley (Velasco 2005), like in some agricultural regions in Oregon made up of immigrant workers (Stephen 2005), associative forms with more institutional life achieve viability once the residential settlement process has been placed into action. The grassroots organizations and political organizations thus become constitutive agents of the settlement process and therefore of the region itself. In addition, in the San Quintin case, the fact that the residential settlement process is produced in a region that until recently was scarcely populated, with little infrastructure and weak state institution presence, poses new questions about the collective forms and political strategies used by settlers to secure access to basic public services in their communities (i.e. water, electricity, schools, health), and strive for their rights as residents.

In sum, from the start of our project we sought to integrate two complementary dimensions of settlement—colonization and social integration—to describe and analyze the recent residential settlement process in San Quintin Valley in all its

⁶ In this sense it is important to recognize the work carried out by academics such as Juan Vicente Palerm (2010, 2002, p. 255) and Travis Du Bry (2007, pp. 15–18), who elaborate more diverse typologies of agricultural workers in rural populations of California using the criteria of length of stay, place of birth, and time and radius of mobility.

⁷ According to Peter Schmitt-Egner (2002), regions are always part of a larger spatial unit that translates into distinct borders and vertical connections in a national or transnational context.

⁸ For a discussion of the symbolic identity in the formation of regions, see Giménez (2009).

richness and complexity. As such, our project is focused on two different but complementary spheres of settlement. The first sphere refers to the transformation of the patterns of residence and mobility of the agricultural laborer population, and the second is focused on how these changes affect the demographic structure of the region, the structure and social organization of families, and the content and orientation of collective actions by the new residents.

With this goal in mind, we approach settlement from a multidisciplinary perspective. We employ demography to document the transformation of mobility, in terms of the diversification of its temporality and rhythm, and the changes in the places of origin and destination. Demography can also be used to explore the transformation of residence in terms of its type and localization and the interactions between the two dimensions. From an anthropological perspective, we focus on the strategies and social resources used by families to access lands and build their own housing, and the economic strategies that serve to reinforce their residential settlement. The collective strategies of social and political movements led by the new inhabitants in the process of residential change are addressed by sociology, through the sociological intervention method described further below, and by ethnographic research; both approaches are focused on the reconstruction of collective actions carried out during the settlement process.

Having outlined the objectives and conceptual design of our project, in the next section we turn to the research methods and techniques we constructed to study the different dimensions of settlement presented above. In this section we also discuss the opportunities and limitations encountered in interdisciplinary collaboration during the phase of designing the study's methods and techniques.

2.3 Methodological Strategy and Research Techniques

2.3.1 Articulation Between Conceptual Scheme and Methodological Strategy

A common methodological strategy in interdisciplinary projects consists of combining research methods and techniques originating from different disciplines into a common methodological instrument that integrates the virtues and strengths of each discipline. Such is the case in migration studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methods with the objective to guarantee both representativity and the richness and depth of results. An example of this approach is the now classic study carried out by Douglas Massey and his collaborators on the migration process of urban and rural communities of western Mexico to the United States, and the role performed by the migrants' social networks in that process (Massey et al. 1987). One of this study's most original methodological contributions was the use of an ethno-survey that combined the goal for representative quantitative findings with the qualitative richness and depth endowed by the ethnographic

method. Its authors defined the ethno-survey as the result of interdisciplinary collaboration between ethnography, sociology, and demography; in other words, a methodological marriage between ethnography and the survey with the objective of obtaining high degrees of both representativity and depth in the study of migration as a social process (Massey et al. 1987, p. 12).

In contrast, after an initial phase of interdisciplinary collaboration in the project's conceptual formulation, the design of the research methods and techniques in our study was marked by disciplinary specialization in which the particularities of demographic, sociological, and anthropological methods were preserved. This research strategy, which seeks to maintain the distinction and rigor of diverse research techniques with the purpose of maximizing the specialization and experience of each team member, was adopted based on both heuristic and pragmatic reasons.

In heuristic terms, in order to address the study of settlement in its double dimension of residence and mobility, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods from demography, sociology, and anthropology. This approach could give an account of both dimensions, the first at the macro-level of the region, and the second at the meso-level of the family and social organizations involved in this process.

These are highly-differentiated levels of analysis difficult to capture by a single methodological technique or instrument. As we can observe in Table 2.1, the methodological work consisted of empirically constructing the concepts of mobility and residence that characterize the experience of settlement in the region, combining the two theoretical perspectives of colonization and social integration described before. Each of these approaches allows us to address different levels of analysis. The colonization approach conceptualizes the phenomena of mobility and residence at the region's macro-historic level. At this level, demography's methodological arsenal appears to be the most appropriate, supported by the region's oral history, which can be contributed by cultural anthropology and sociology through biographical or testimonial interviews with the pioneer inhabitants.

The second level of analysis is meso and is composed of observation of the same residential and mobility phenomena but in analytical units such as the family and social organizations. The conceptual focus of social integration provides explanatory tools for this level. Here, the methodological contribution from each of the disciplines is complemented in both phenomena and in the analytical units, with greater complementarity existing here than at the macro level.

In pragmatic terms, we decided to take advantage of the specialization of each of the team members in certain research methods and techniques in order to delve deeper into the demographic and social processes of residence and mobility. With this approach, we aimed to complement, rather than integrate, the specific methods employed from demography, anthropology, and sociology, and to develop a dialogue among these disciplines as the basis for analysis and interpretation of the empirical results obtained through these methods. It is in this dialogue that we locate both the potentialities and challenges of interdisciplinary work.

Table 2.1 Theoretical and methodological multidisciplinary approach

Theoretical focuses	Analytical levels and units	Dimensions	Disciplinary perspectives	Methods	Indicators or observable characteristics
Settlement Colonization	Macro: region	Mobility	Demography aggregated data	Chronological history of population censuses (1960–2000)	- Total population - Distribution among administrative delegations
		Residence	Demography aggregated data	1990–2000 censuses	- Characteristics of housing - Socio-demographic characteristics of the population
Integration	Meso: family	Mobility	Oral history	Biographical interviews	- Meaningful passages and events - Memory tropes - Leading characters - Historic story lines
			Sociology	Biographical interviews	- Logic and reasons behind mobility - Dynamics of mobility
		Anthropology	Ethnography	- Family strategies employed to organize mobility	
		Demography individual data	Biographical survey (EBIMRE)	- Temporality of mobility - Duration, frequency - Origins/destinations	
Residence	Meso: social organizations	Residence	Demography individual data	EBIMRE	- Type of residence - Localization of residence - Residential trajectories
			Anthropology	Ethnography	- Family strategies to obtain land and establish residence
Residence	Meso: social organizations	Residence	Anthropology Sociology	Ethnography Interviews Sociological intervention. Biographical interviews	- Collective strategies to obtain lands - Residential strategies - Agents, interests, resources, and power relations
			Anthropology Sociology	Ethnography Interviews Sociological intervention. Biographical interviews	- Mobilization events - Symbols of regional identity - Collective identifications - Local attributions

Source the authors

Below we present the connection between the previously described conceptual design and the methods and techniques employed in our study. In the presentation of methods and techniques we advance some results that were fundamental in the alignment of the method in the research process. In other words, the research instruments were refined on the basis of some of the preliminary results.

2.3.2 Settlements as a Colonization Process: Macro Level

To analyze the San Quintin region at the macro level, we defined a demographic methodological approach based on analysis of aggregated data from the different population censuses. Because the San Quintin region does not correspond to a single administrative entity, the greatest challenge in this documentary technique consisted of making the INEGI data at the localities level coincide with the regional unit of analysis defined by our project.⁹ This recompilation facilitated reconstruction of the chronological history of the region's population since 1960, illustrating the exponential demographic growth that transformed an almost barren region with a small number of pioneer outposts (with fewer than 4,000 inhabitants in 1960) to a semi-rural area by the year 2010 with 92,177 inhabitants distributed in numerous localities of varying sizes. The greater availability of census data beginning in 1990 allowed us to study the transformation of the population's residential patterns, particularly between 1990 and 2000. Several indicators were constructed in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of the population (sex, age, educational level, economically-active population, etc.) and of the housing at the beginning and the end of the 1990s, a decade of profound transformations in the region. The decline in the male-to-female index (from 105.4 to 102.5 %) and in the economic activity rate (from 55 to 49 %) speaks to the process of family settlement during the 1990s. The residential transformation toward greater access to services and better housing conditions is also documented. For example, the percentage of housing with electricity increased from 63 to 83 %, while that of homes with dirt floors decreased from 24 to 15 %.

In addition, some qualitative techniques such as collecting life histories of pioneer settlers were implemented by the sociologist and the anthropologist with the objective of documenting the region's colonization process from an oral history perspective.

⁹ We define the region as composed of four delegations of the Ensenada municipality (Punta Colonet, Camalú, Vicente Guerrero, and San Quintin).

2.4 Settlement as a Social Integration Process: Family, Community and Social Actors

2.4.1 Demography of Residence and Mobility

To obtain quantitative information on both the residence and mobility dimensions at the meso level of the family, a specific survey was developed to compile information at the individual and household levels. To document the change process (from camps to *colonias*), this was a retrospective survey aimed at providing information on the trajectory of the individuals. Called the Biographical Survey on Residential Mobility and Employment in San Quintín (*Encuesta Biográfica de Movilidad Residencial y de Empleo en San Quintín—EBIMRE*), it was applied between May and June 2005. The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts: one section compiled information on all members of a household at the time of the interview, and a second section recorded an individual biography with information on the entire life of a member of the couple who heads the household (head of household or spouse).

Given the scarcity of data on the San Quintín region, the decision was made to develop the survey using probabilistic sampling, with the purpose of obtaining results that could be generalized to the population as a whole. The sample design for a region like San Quintín required various adjustments. Population distribution within the region indicates a pattern of wide dispersion among differently sized localities. For example, in 2000 43 % of the population lived in localities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants. To take into consideration this population dispersion, it was important to include the highest number of population centers possible, but this could only be achieved if a more reduced geographical area was considered. Thus we limited the survey area to the two most highly populated administrative delegations (75 % of the population is concentrated in this southern part of the region, corresponding to the Vicente Guerrero and San Quintín delegations), and we included all localities with more than 1,000 inhabitants in the sampling frame. Among these localities, we distinguished between *colonias* and labor camps. In the first, we constructed the sampling frame in both individual homes and collective homes, or tenement rooms. Based on this frame, we selected the 900 homes in which we would carry out the survey. In the camp localities, we used a specific sampling process, taking into account that the sample selection could not be random since we needed the owner's authorization for access to these camps. Within the authorized camps, a random selection was made of the 120 rooms/housing units in which the interviews were carried out. The objective of this small sample was to obtain information on family structures in this residential universe that would allow comparisons to be made with those of the residents of *colonias*.¹⁰

¹⁰ The EBIMRE's household section documents family organization, including household structure and domestic economy. In comparison with the camps, family organization in the

The EBIMRE was applied by local interviewers contracted for the project, the majority of whom were employees of the *Programa Nacional con Jornaleros Agrícolas* (PRONJAG) under Mexico's *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL). Their strong familiarity with the various *colonias* in the region allowed us to obtain a good response rate (the survey's non-response rate was 9 % in *colonias*). The survey was designed to document and analyze the settlement process of agricultural workers in the area, based on the trajectories of mobility, residence, employment, and family. The trajectories compile a large number of events from the different dimensions of the life histories of heads of households or spouses. This questionnaire design is based on international experience in the field of biographical methods in demography, including some innovations for gathering information on seasonal mobility (Coubès 2005).

Regarding mobility, the biographical survey describes the different migratory movements of the head of household or spouse, according to two seasonal scales. The first is the annual scale for primary migrations, while the second is a more precise scale of the residential system organized in months, used for seasonal movements. These two registries allow the construction of various indicators around the seasonality, duration, and frequency of mobility as well as the origin and destination of movements. In regards to the residence, the EBIMRE collects information on the type of residence (camp, tenement room, *colonia*) of the head of household/spouse since their arrival in San Quintin. This information allows the reconstruction of the residential trajectory in San Quintin, and is analyzed with classification methods based on duration and type of transition, including a direct move from camp to colony, an intermediate phase of tenement housing, or other variations. In addition, the survey facilitates observation of this residence trajectory in relation to both the labor trajectory and family trajectory, serving to analyze interactions between residential transition and labor and family changes. The EBIMRE survey allows the generalization of its results based on a probabilistic sampling characteristic of quantitative methods and, at the same time, a deeper look at life trajectories based on the registry's precision.

Although the methodological instrument used is particular to demography, the questionnaire design benefited from interdisciplinary teamwork. Prior to construction of the survey, both the team's anthropologist and sociologist conducted an inquiry with male and female inhabitants of different ages on the logics and dynamics of mobility, through ethnography and in-depth interviews with a biographical perspective. Both methods provided us with first-hand information on the logics of geographic mobility, which might be family or labor motivated and characterized by different directions and diverse purposes. In addition, because the EBIMRE was designed from the start with a multi-thematic vocation that would reach across several of the aspects associated with residential settlement

(Footnote 10 continued)

colonias presents differences that we suggest are results of the settlement process, including the reconstitution of the nuclear family and the diversification of labor opportunities among household members.

experience, it favored the participation of all team members contributing their particular experiences from their own fields of knowledge and specialization. The design and wording of the questions in the questionnaire reflected the field research experience from the exploratory ethnographic and biographic interview. Construction of the questions also benefited greatly from pilot fieldwork, as for example adapting the wording of some of the questions to the folk expressions used by the region's inhabitants.

Once the design was concluded, the labor of testing the survey in the field also benefited from teamwork. For example, while the team's demographer conducted the interview, the anthropologist or sociologist observed and took notes on what happened in the interviewer-interviewee interaction, and the reactions and doubts expressed by the latter. The objective was to use these observations to adjust the type and order of the questions, as well as the way in which some of the questions were stated. Because the survey is a rather widely-used instrument in the social sciences, and there is generally a certain familiarity with this type of instrument in many disciplines, interdisciplinary work using surveys seems to be rather manageable. Despite this collaboration, given the technical complexity of the biographic survey as a highly specialized instrument, the team's demographer had the final responsibility for its design in order to guarantee its rigor.

2.4.2 Ethnographic Approach

To document the residential and mobility aspects of the settlement process, the anthropologist in the team carried out field work in several *colonias* in San Quintin Valley. The design of the ethnographic work addressed two differentiated areas of settlement. In the first, the domestic group was adopted as the unit of analysis with the goal of understanding the economic and social strategies that allow the act of settlement and the residential transition from camps to *colonias*. While the survey reflects the structure and demographic composition of households, the ethnographic work promoted observation of the dynamics within household groups that facilitate settlement. The ethnographic study employed two primary techniques: in-depth interviews, and participant observation. The in-depth interviews helped to document the transition process from camps to *colonias* with a high degree of detail, as well as the family strategies that make it possible for rural laborers to obtain plots of land and build their own housing. In both the interviews and participant observation, special emphasis was placed on understanding the impact of residential settlement on the division of labor by gender and age within the family, the way in which production and reproduction activities are reorganized as consequences of this process, and how workers themselves evaluate the impact of settlement on their lives.

In contrast to the survey, the household interviews were not based on random sampling, but were chosen to illustrate the diversity of residential and mobility patterns. The goal was to obtain a diachronic perspective and a wealth of detailed information to complement and illustrate the results obtained by the EBIMRE. Household interviews allowed the collection of precise data on family budget including income and expenses, division of labor by gender and age, housing investment strategies, education, and other spheres related to the residential settlement experience. In addition, life histories of both men and women heads of households allowed precise documentation of the trajectories through which they settled in the region, their labor histories before and after settlement, and the diverse ways by which they developed a sense of belonging in their new communities. These interviews and life stories also gathered information about the migration trajectories of household members prior to and after residential settlement, including the motives that drove them to migrate to the United States after settling down in San Quintín. In so doing, this information allowed us to analyze the dynamic connections between settlement and geographical mobility mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The second arena of ethnographic field research focused on the role performed by both government agencies and private institutions at the local level to facilitate and regulate the residential settlement of families in the *colonias* studied. In each of the selected *colonias*, the anthropologist documented the state governmental programs implemented to support this process, as well as the roles played by churches, NGOs, and other institutions. The hypothesis that underlies this approach is that settlement is a complex process that goes beyond settlers themselves, involving a variety of other actors and institutional resources that constitute the social and political framework within which the settlement experience of workers and families must be situated and analyzed.

Three San Quintin Valley *colonias* were chosen for the ethnographic work, including one mostly inhabited by Triqui indigenous immigrants, one by Zapotecs, and a third with a more ethnically heterogeneous population of mestizos and indigenous people. With a population of just over 1,900 inhabitants, this last colony includes not only rural laborers but also merchants, drivers, independent contractors, among others, illustrating the occupational mobility processes and socioeconomic differentiation that result from the settlement process. For its part, the Triqui colony has a population of close to 1,200 and it is poorer in economic terms and more homogenous in its ethnic profile. Nonetheless, its inhabitants have developed some of the most effective organizations to negotiate with the state government for access to basic resources, making it possible to study the way in which ethnic identity is mobilized as a political resource to strengthen settlement and establish roots in the region.

2.4.3 Sociological Intervention and Biographical Interviews

As mentioned above, an important dimension of the concept of settlement as social and political process refers to the collective actors that participate in this process.¹¹ The focus on these associative forms enriched the hypothesis on residential settlement as a complex phenomenon that involves a variety of social actors and collective resources that are mobilized beyond the domestic group. It also allowed for the documentation of the obstacles these groups and organizations encounter and the strategies they deploy to face these challenges.

This hypothesis on the role of collective action to advance settlement was tested from the sociological standpoint through the sociological intervention method (Touraine 1981), a method predicated on the recognition of the capacity of social actors to reflect upon themselves and their collective actions. One of the method's initial tasks is to define the social movement that is the object of study. This research defined social movement as the set of grassroots and political organizations active in the region. The method involves three phases. In the first, members of the social movement under study debate among themselves to define the unity of the movement. In the second, this group meets with allies and adversaries to discuss the movement's agenda. And in the third, the researcher presents the systematization of findings from the first two phases for discussion within the original group-members of the movement.

For this project, a methodological adjustment was made by introducing a preliminary phase for defining the subject of the movement and reconstructing the context of the social actors to delimit the collective field of action. In the end, four phases were implemented, taking place between 2004 and 2005. In each of the research phases, the residential settlement process emerged as a central theme. In the first phase, encompassing the arduous work of biographical interviews with the leaders and activists of organizations, the objective was to construct the universe of organizations and the agenda for discussion in workshops. As this universe was slowly constructed, it progressively broke away from our initial assumptions regarding the leadership role of the traditional labor-oriented organizations with high visibility in the movements in the region during the 1980s. This research phase was also characterized by the ethnographic findings of the team's anthropologist, who revealed the importance of small colony committees or settler groups as relevant actors in residential settlement formed on the basis of relations among those originating from the same region. Finally, the universe was definitively constituted by leaders and activists from fourteen organizations that each defended its declared interests, such as labor, ethnic-political, and residential interests. The biographical interviews made it possible to reconstruct a chronology of mobilizations in relation to lands, assistance for housing construction, and installation of public services.

¹¹ A detailed description can be found in Velasco (2011).

In-depth interviews with different inhabitants of the region had already brought to light the role played by collective action in the process of leaving the camps and becoming established in *colonias*. Later in the interviews with leaders and activists conducted during the course of fieldwork, we began to delineate the various possible collective strategies for achieving such residential change. As a result of these interviews, we found varying types of residential settlement agents, whose profiles were considered for the construction of the sample of activists invited to the sociological intervention workshops.

This phase was fundamental not only because it allowed us to identify a certain social unity in terms of class and ethnicity of organizations, but also because it allowed us to define the social actors with whom these organizations were contending, either in alliances or in disputes. Those other actors were part of the context for the collective action of these organizations, and for this reason in-depth interviews were also carried out with journalists, governmental functionaries, church members, and agricultural and service-sector business people.

The following phases of the method's application were carried out through three workshop sessions, which as a whole sought to reveal the unity, conflict, and identity of the movement. The struggle for residence surfaced as a central theme. For example, in the first workshop session, similar experiences in mobilizing for lands and services emerged as a line of collective identity among participating activists and leaders.

The reconstruction of mobilizations identified a turning point between the labor mobilizations of the 1980s and the residential movements that began in the late 1980s and gained full force in the 1990s. When land was seized, broad-based mobilizations appeared with different strategies and residential agents. When housing was built and installations were completed, collective action fragmented further, depending more on small committees that were formed in the new residential nuclei. The committees immediately acquired status in the administrative structure of the territorial organization in the nascent region, specifically the *colonias* and delegations. This was how the colony committees emerged, and their mission was to act as intermediaries for the new settlers in their demands for the legalization of plots and provision of services. The importance of residence in the definition of the social movement's unity around the residents' identity guided the decision to incorporate the residential allies and adversaries in the following workshop session.

In the workshop's second session, when the study group compared its viewpoints with those of allies and adversaries, the issues of land legalization and services emerged once again. In this area of dispute, governmental functionaries had displaced the businesspeople and yellow unions who were the antagonists in the mobilizations during the 1980s. In the final workshop session, the initial group had grown, and some allies—such as leaders of transportation associations—had come to form part of the nucleus group. In this session, the researcher presented a systematization of the discussions into a few hypotheses on the central issues of unity, conflict, and the field of relations in regional and global contexts. Participants in this phase were the members of the first workshop who made up the target

group, evaluating and critiquing the systematization and hypotheses presented by the researcher.

The units of analysis in this last methodological approach were the social organizations, including those based on ethnicity, class, or residential factors. The sociological intervention method demands not only solid knowledge of the theory that underlies this focus but also its rigorous application according to its particular guidelines. For this reason, the workshops were conducted under the strict supervision of the project's sociologist, although she benefited from the work as a team during the discussion around both the planning and logistics of the instrument's application. As mentioned above, the results obtained through this method were complemented by ethnographic work carried out in the *colonias* which served to document the manner in which collective action operates at the local level in the political dispute for access to resources in the *colonias*, and through which new settlers seek to consolidate and legitimize their establishment in the region.

2.5 Conclusion

Interdisciplinary work poses important theoretical and methodological challenges that require strategic decisions on how to build conceptual bridges to respond to them. This problem is further complicated when trying to study topics that have traditionally been located in a particular academic discipline with limited dialogue with others. In such cases, multidisciplinary research is different than work in areas such as migration studies and ethnic studies, which by nature are interdisciplinary and have a long history of collaboration among disciplines. In this chapter, we have described the experience of the study of the settlement process in the San Quintin Valley—in its double aspects of colonization and social integration—that confronted the challenge of a sparse tradition of interdisciplinary dialogue centered on the notion of settlement. In this context, our challenge has consisted, to a large degree, in building conceptual bridges, developing a theoretical focus, and designing methodological approaches that, in the analysis of the results obtained, will allow us to establish a fluid interdisciplinary dialogue.

In this chapter we have aimed at opening up the 'black box' of interdisciplinary collaboration as research praxis. From this perspective we propose that the praxis of interdisciplinary research can be seen as a process that consists of different stages. Each stage poses a distinct set of challenges but also presents opportunities to enhance dialogue across disciplines, requiring different approaches and research strategies. As we have explained, rather than a unique integrated interdisciplinary approach, our study has used diverse degrees and forms of collaboration among the participant disciplines of anthropology, demography, and sociology, depending on the particular phase of the project. The project's conceptual design was characterized by a high degree of synergy in teamwork, particularly when integrating the perspectives of colonization and social integration in order to study the settlement of thousands of indigenous and non-indigenous laborers and their families over the

past decades in this arid region of Baja California. This approach was based on the notion that an interdisciplinary project has to combine and integrate conceptual tools from various disciplines from the onset in its theoretical design to ensure that the later phases of analysis and write up can capitalize on the heuristic potential offered by cross-disciplinary research. This interdisciplinary dialogue was essential when defining the project's macro and meso units of analysis along with the models of residence and mobility, which are the nucleus of our study.

A different approach was taken on the next phase of methodological design during which, as explained above, there were different degrees of interdisciplinary collaboration. The biographical survey was designed and implemented following the canon of this demographic research tool to ensure its rigor, although interdisciplinary synergy of the project's participants facilitated a certain amount of border-crossing among disciplines. Likewise, the ethnographic field research and the sociological intervention workshops were each developed individually by the anthropologist and sociologist in the team respectively, and even though some degree of teamwork was involved, interdisciplinary dialogue was scarce. This limitation can be explained by both the desire to preserve the rigor of these methods as well as our own disciplinary identities, which at times complicates the interdisciplinary endeavor. Nonetheless, our collective work and interdisciplinary perspective functioned as self-critiquing mechanisms and often served to question the methodological and practical assumptions of our respective disciplinary specializations.

Although our study integrates quantitative and qualitative methods, our methodological strategy differs then from the strategy of other interdisciplinary projects that seek disciplinary integration in the design and implementation of methods. In our case, we opted for a different epistemological strategy that seeks to maintain the distinction and rigor of each of our own disciplinary methods. Neither of these two interdisciplinary research strategies is superior *a priori*. Rather, the criteria that should serve as guides when determining the most adequate methodological approach are the nature of the topic to be studied and the specific objectives pursued by each project.

Our experience in this project shows that the challenge of interdisciplinary research consists of resolving the tension between, on the one hand, specialization—which guarantees rigor in methods and techniques—and on the other, defocalization and the crossing of disciplinary borders. The objective is not to constantly work to resolve this tension. Instead, according to the different phases of research, disciplinary specialization and defocalization from individual disciplines can alternately come into play. It is in this back-and-forth between poles that teamwork experience and interdisciplinary work are constructed. We believe the heuristic value of interdisciplinary work depends in large part on maintaining the rigor of the research techniques employed. From this perspective, the division of labor among the different disciplines should not be seen as an obstacle but rather as a necessary phase from which one transits to interdisciplinary dialogue.

The challenges presented by interdisciplinary research do not end in the phase of methodological design and implementation. Rather, these challenges persist and pose new dilemmas in the next stages of analysis and writing up the results. How should results obtained through methodologies anchored in different disciplines be

presented and integrated? How should the tensions and contrasts between quantitative and qualitative data and information be resolved? And, what is the best way to modulate the different disciplinary voices when writing up the results of the study? In our case, at the present time, we are confronting and learning to address the dilemmas involved in these two last phases of our interdisciplinary project.

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Public demonstrations for better labor conditions in domestic service in Hempstead, Long Island, New York, 2007. *Source* The photograph was taken by Marina Ariza who granted permission to reproduce it



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-02692-3>

The Practice of Research on Migration and Mobilities

Rivera-Sánchez, L.; Lozano-Ascencio, F. (Eds.)

2014, VI, 191 p. 18 illus., 11 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-02692-3