

**PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF CONDITIONAL WELFARE  
SUPPORT: THE CASE OF PROSPERA IN MEXICO.**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an investigation into the lived experiences of people in poverty. Through the voices of beneficiaries of a conditional cash transfer programme in Mexico, it aims to explain the relationship between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty. To that end, it develops the mechanisms that connect the material hardships with the relational and symbolical experiences of poverty. The findings of this thesis evidence the specific forms in which conditioning government support on proving personal worth pushes people further away from society; from their control over their living conditions and ultimately from their power to lead a life of their own choosing. The results of this thesis evidence the reproduction of inequalities and the trapping of people living in worse off political, economic and symbolic conditions in poverty. The voices and experiences of research participants attest to the injuries of a *“one-size-fits-all”* approach to poverty alleviation.

*To Tania*

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## ACRONYMS

<b>CCT</b>	Conditional Cash Transfer Programme
<b>CEPAL/ECLAC</b>	Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean
<b>CIDAC</b>	Research Centre for Development
<b>CIESAS</b>	Centre for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology
<b>COLMEX</b>	College of Mexico
<b>CONAPO</b>	National Population Council
<b>CONEVAL</b>	National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy
<b>COPLAMAR</b>	General Coordination of the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalised Groups
<b>CPC</b>	Community Promotion Committees
<b>DOF</b>	Federal Official Gazette of the Federation
<b>EFH</b>	Axis of Human Flourishing
<b>ENCEL</b>	Survey Evaluation of Households
<b>ENCELURB</b>	Survey Evaluation of Rural Households
<b>ENIGH</b>	National Survey of Income and Expenditure Households
<b>ENCASEH</b>	Survey of Socioeconomic Characteristics Households
<b>ENSANUT</b>	National Survey of Health and Nutrition
<b>ENUT</b>	National Survey of the Use of Time
<b>ENV</b>	Axis of Standard of Living
<b>ESIAN</b>	Integrated Strategy for Attention to Nutrition
<b>EVALUA</b>	Council for the Evaluation of Social Development
<b>EZLN</b>	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
<b>IDB</b>	Inter-American Development Bank
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INEGI</b>	National Institute of Statistics and Geography
<b>LBMa</b>	Minimum Wellbeing Threshold



<b>LVPCS</b>	Line of Permanent Verifications of Socioeconomic Conditions
<b>MIMIP</b>	Integrated Poverty Measurement Method
<b>NBES</b>	Normative Basket of Essential Satisfiers
<b>NBF</b>	Normative Basket of Food
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OPORTUNIDADES</b>	Programme of Human Development, Oportunidades
<b>PAN</b>	National Action Party
<b>PIDER</b>	Programme for Rural Development
<b>PRI</b>	Institutional Revolutionary Party
<b>PROGRESA</b>	Programme of Education, Health and Nutrition
<b>PRONASOL</b>	National Programme of Solidarity
<b>PROSPERA</b>	Social Inclusion Programme
<b>PSE</b>	Poverty and Social Exclusion
<b>SAM</b>	Mexican Food System
<b>SEDESOL</b>	Secretary of Social Development
<b>SESNSP</b>	Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System
<b>TLCAN/NAFTA</b>	North American Federal Trade Agreement
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WDR</b>	World Development Report

# Chapter I Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to lay bare the content, development and implications of this research. It first presents a general overview of the research, then briefly describes the structure of this thesis and concludes with its limitations.

## **1.1 Overview of research**

In 2000, a far flung community in the mountains of Puebla, Mexico received for the first time government support in the form of direct cash in exchange for certain conditions. Decades of government neglect coupled with unmet basic needs such as food, clothing and education seemed to come to an end. The receipt of support from this programme brought hope for the members of that community who thought they would no longer experience those conditions and perceived the government's attention as a sign of change. Some months later, and a few miles away, in the capital city of Mexico the government celebrated the swearing-in of the first ever President from an opposition party to win the elections. Despite the profound political transformations accompanying the shift in power, that particular social programme remained. This thesis is an investigation into that programme.

The aforementioned mountainous community called "*Altepetl*" was one of the first rural areas to receive a previously untried, innovative type of social provision which in the years to come would develop into the most important anti-poverty strategy in the country, a model taken up worldwide as conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes. A trip to that community back in 2002 inspired this research, which is located in the disjunction between the growing budget allocated to development, the stagnant levels of poverty for the past twenty years (CONEVAL, 2016) and officialdom's discourse of successful anti-poverty strategies.

The pervasiveness of poverty despite investment allocated to development is one of the three reasons that prompted this research. Despite growing research on

poverty alleviation worldwide and in Mexico in particular, the literature - with some extraordinary exceptions evidenced in the work of the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) and Research Centre for Development (CIDAC) - has not paid sufficient attention to the voices of the real experts of poverty, namely the people living in poverty themselves (Lister, 2004). In fact, on the definition and measures of poverty, some researchers have advocated avoiding the inclusion of the perspectives and opinions of “*the poor*” because they are allegedly ill equipped to actually understand their “*real*” needs and agency (Boltvinik, 2005b). This renders all the more important the attempts by this doctoral thesis to put voices of people in poverty centre stage.

The second motivation for this research was to fill the literature vacuum on the link between the deprivations characteristic of poverty and its concomitant lived experience. Not only have the experiences of poverty in Mexico remained backstage, as previously pointed out, but also their appearance is often merely in the form of a footnote, a simple illustration or as background. Anthropological and gender studies carried out by the Centre for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS) and the College of Mexico (COLMEX) respectively are some rare cases of research with and through the lived experiences of people in poverty. Notwithstanding, in their research the material and the symbolic appear disconnected, a commonality shared with poverty research elsewhere with some pioneering efforts that have actively called to bring both together (Lister, 2004). Accordingly, this thesis builds on the original idea of the poverty wheel coined by Ruth Lister and advances it by developing the hub that connects the core of the wheel with its rim; it then sets the wheel in motion through the development of a theory that ties them together.

The third reason that encouraged this research is the growing influence of mainstream econometrical approaches to poverty alleviation taken as the *holy grail* of objectivity and thus the main sources of data informing policy decision-making. The difficulty accessing primary data through fieldwork and growing ease of accessing secondary quantitative data through Information Technology might be an important explanation for the above mentioned research vacuum. These, together with the

growing momentum by positivist approaches to social sciences and the increased investment nationally and internationally in research using certain quantitative methods, are at the core of this.

This is more evident in the light of internal and external evaluations of the CCT *Prospera* and research about poverty in Mexico, which focus almost exclusively on statistical analysis to understand, analyse and explain what both mean for the economy and for people. The fact that people's experiences of the welfare system and poverty remain minimised reflects more than simple methodological preferences. In fact, the global reputation of those methods over qualitative, ethnographic or anthropological research manifest the wrongly conceived epistemological superiority of certain schools of thought over others. This is a *de facto* reality for instance in countries such as Mexico, where the claims of research validity in social sciences attach to statistical and econometric approaches as evidenced by the evaluations of social programmes in that country. Notwithstanding, the growing research drawing on Marxism (Yibing, 2011), de-colonialism (Icaza, 2010) and "indigenismo" (Gonzalez, 2004) approaches in their different streams, is a positive sign of change in the right direction. This thesis aims to contribute to this global endeavour of countering the claims of epistemological superiority by positivist approaches, using critical realism as an approach to a social problem.

The review of government reports and evaluations of social programmes shed light on three dynamics. The first is that, drawing on liberal and neo-classical economics, the government's ideology of change produced a new wave of social policy in the form of conditional cash transfer programmes. The second is that the influence of financial institutions facilitated the roll out and expansion of CCT throughout the region and later across other regions. The third is that the efforts to avoid corruption through official evaluations, coupled with the methodologically sound reports of CCTs, have defined and constrained the extent and outputs of results from the external and internal evaluations while further reproducing the story of success told by the Mexican government.

Notwithstanding, the review of the literature identifies two limitations. Firstly, research in Mexico on people's needs with regard to social provision neglects people's experiences of poverty. Secondly, despite their wide variety of approaches and methodologies the external and internal evaluations of CCT in that country have similar limitations. In their attempt to fulfil the government mandate of comparability and focus on human capital development of its welfare recipients, they miss the link between material deprivations and personal experiences of poverty.

This doctoral thesis does not subscribe to, and in fact is critical of, the approaches to *Prospera* that focus on its impact on human capital formation, the external factors reducing its impact or the problems in its functioning, design or implementation - that is to say, all research that understands it exclusively as a policy tool of social welfare with no other purpose and in fact outcome than to improve human capital formation and facilitate people's access to the labour market, detached from political and economic agendas.

Rather, this thesis builds on emerging critical literature about *Prospera* that goes beyond narrow policy recommendations and calls for a reconfiguration of social policy provision on the basis of people's own experience of conditionality (Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012; Molyneux, 2006) and taking into account the negative consequences of the "one-size-fits-all" approach to poverty alleviation (Smith-Oka, 2009). Accordingly, this literature challenges *Prospera's* claim to break down in the long term the intergenerational transmission of poverty. However, this thesis goes a step further and investigates the role of *Prospera* in pushing the neoliberal rationale onto its welfare recipients by analysing the lived material and relational-symbolic experience of beneficiaries in urban and rural Mexico. Consequently, a robust approach to poverty that is able to account for both necessarily entails the inclusion of the voices of people in poverty while also developing the ways in which material deprivations are experienced individually and tracing this to broader social, political and economic dynamics. The theory of alienation applied to poverty which I have developed and applied in this research constitutes such an effort.

This thesis also contributes to the investigation of poverty by approaching it from an analysis of needs and agency. In this sense, this research draws from the approach to needs originally elaborated in historically materialist terms by Karl Marx and Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1954) but advancing it through the mediated character of agency within and outside the labour process. In this sense, it is a critical appraisal of a big part of the literature on conditionalities, particularly in Britain, that builds on theories of citizenship and social rights. This literature has become more prominent largely because of government reforms during the coalition government of David Cameron (2010-2016) and austerity measures that have impacted jobseekers (Fletcher and Wright, 2018), the disabled (McNeill et al., 2017), migrants (Dwyer et al., 2019) and the homeless (Johnsen, 2018; Watts, 2018). Thus, it has rightly advocated for a need to stop cutting welfare provision by highlighting the negative effects of conditionalities on welfare recipients that strikes a chord with some findings from this research. However, it has fallen short in two respects. Firstly, it has failed to recognise those measures as a manifestation of a capitalist system of production that in turn has prevented it from properly accounting for the power dynamics at play and the role of social welfare in the reproduction of the exploitation of capital. Secondly, its focus on citizenship and to a certain extent capabilities emphasises an approach to agency vis-à-vis welfare that hampers its understanding of agency beyond rights, that is, the core dimensions that make up people's personal experiences and interactions with the material world that a focus on needs on the other hand allows to elucidate. As such, this thesis posits key findings that, while mirroring some of the conclusions from that literature, actually show the inadequacy of understanding poverty in relation to citizenship and rights as opposed to individual needs and agency.

This doctoral thesis is also a contribution to the field of social policy in Latin America, which still remains dormant to the inequalities in the region, as noted in a seminal work coordinated by Guillermo Trejo and Claudio Jones (Trejo et al., 2003). Building on the experiences of poverty under capitalist neoliberalism from the vantage point of social policy, this thesis puts forward evidence about the contradictions posed by capitalism within welfare provision. In particular, it illuminates the tensions

between a welfare system that advances a logic of “*deservingness*” via surveillance of behaviour and the needs and agency of people in poverty vis-à-vis the dynamics of capital. In this, the case of urban and rural Mexico offers fertile ground for the analysis of poverty.

The theory of alienation developed here includes three core elements: alienation from opportunities and resources, alienation from “*oneself*” and alienation from others. The theory of alienation put forward by this thesis differentiates from previous accounts in three respects. Firstly, it links the material conditions in this case of poverty with the lived experience. This is a key movement as it allows the structural dynamics at play under capitalist neoliberalism to be accounted for, along with the impacts on individuals as well as in their interactions socially. Secondly, while accounting for the labour dynamics - the breeding ground of the theories of alienation - this thesis takes the theory of alienation to the field of social dynamics of people in poverty. This movement enables the granular investigation of a group of society that has most suffered the consequences of a system resting on capital exploitation. Thirdly, and related to the previous two points, this investigation applies the theory of alienation to the realities of poverty in an attempt to operationalise the mechanics of alienation and consequences on the everyday lives of people and the lasting consequences often across generations. To that end, it focuses on the intersection between poverty and social policy by analysing the lived experience of beneficiaries of the *Prospera* conditional cash transfer programme in Mexico.

The central aim of this research is to explore the consequences of neoliberalism manifested through a welfare system that aims to guarantee compliance suitable to market dynamics. That is to say, this research aims to demonstrate that the CCT programme *Prospera* and its underlying ideology of change and social mobility alienates people in poverty. The research questions designed to achieve such tasks are:

***The central research question driving this research: How does the concept of alienation reframe the relationships between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty and its impact in Mexican society?***

*The following four are subdivisions of the central research question:*

*I. To what extent can Prospera be viewed as an archetype of neoliberal policy?*

*II. In what ways does Prospera hinder the satisfaction of needs for its recipients in terms of their resources and opportunities?*

*III. In what ways does Prospera impact the “self” of its beneficiaries in terms of self-worth, self-esteem and power over their living conditions?*

*IV. To what extent does Prospera promote internal division among its beneficiaries and within the broader society?*

The four subdivided research questions are central to answering the central research question in specific ways. The first research question aims to elucidate the embeddedness of neoliberalism in Mexican social policy with an emphasis on the main anti-poverty strategy deployed by that country during the 1990s. The second research question purports to illuminate the specific ways in which *Prospera* has been central in the dissatisfaction of needs and loss of control of resources and opportunities of its beneficiaries. The purpose of the third research question is to demonstrate the internalisation of the negative impacts of *Prospera* (rationale, discourse and functioning) by its welfare recipients. The fourth and final research questions aims to evidence the adverse consequences of *Prospera* on the social fabric.

## **1.2. Thesis structure**

In order to answer the research questions above, the following chapters are structured as follows:



*Chapter II, Prospera*, first discusses the evolution of social policy in Mexico and categorises it into four waves. It then discusses the changes, assumptions and functioning behind the fourth wave that is CCT programmes in Mexico. The third part reviews the literature around *Prospera* and shows that twenty years of reports and evaluations coupled with the government use of them for political purposes have served to advance *Prospera's* authority regarding welfare recipients, with lasting consequences that the three findings chapters analyse. The final part discusses the ideology of change driving the content of CCTs with an emphasis on *Prospera*. Particular attention goes to the role of financial institutions, policy makers and experts in setting and rolling out this type of social provision in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, and critically investigates and traces the underlying rationale of CCTs to neoliberalism.

*Chapter III, A theory of alienation*, is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the historical changes in debates on and approaches to poverty and presents a fresh account to operationalise the material and symbolic dimensions of poverty. The second part discusses the role of needs and agency with a particular emphasis on the literature around poverty. The third part presents the theory of alienation, its content, mechanisms and significance for the investigation into poverty.

*Chapter IV, Methodology*, elaborates the methodology of this thesis. It walks the reader systematically through the entirety of the research process. First, it describes the process behind the literature review. Then, it justifies the methods, location of research, selection of research participants, sampling and relevant ethical considerations. It defines the scope and boundaries of this research and explains the interconnection across chapters. It explains the development of this thesis, with particular attention going to the relation theory, fieldwork and findings in the final configuration of the theoretical apparatus of alienation in poverty.

*Chapter V, Alienation from opportunities and resources*, starts the analysis of findings. It investigates the disjunction between the control exercised by the CCT programme *Prospera* and the material reality and symbolic experiences of people in

poverty. Particular attention goes to households' management of limited resources at a micro-level, to investigate the burdens of CCTs in relation to the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency of welfare recipients. It argues that the *Prospera's* focus on training beneficiaries through conditional money, coupled with the dynamics it generates, further alienates people from their resources and opportunities. It develops the mechanism of geographical inequalities in the urban and rural divide to explain the embeddedness of neoliberalism. What drives this chapter is a critical investigation of access to resources while emphasising the symbolic experience of local inequalities that manifests in the form of powerlessness.

*Chapter VI, Alienation from "oneself"*, investigates how the hard work, effort and sacrifice of people in poverty do not amount to satisfaction of needs or realisation of agency. It emphasises how the underlying definition of poverty by CCTs stands in opposition to the living conditions of people in poverty. The argument is that the focus on self-reliance and adaptability by CCTs through surveillance of people's behaviour is at odds with their living conditions and alienates them from their "self". What drives this chapter is an analysis of the individual agency and needs of people in poverty with an emphasis on the various forms of control by *Prospera* that reduce welfare recipients' perception of self-worth.

*Chapter VII, Alienation from others*, investigates the social dynamics in urban and rural areas of people in poverty in relation to welfare provision. It pays particular attention to the asymmetries of power nurtured and produced by a type of social provision that promotes social interactions prone to disempower people in less advantageous economic and social conditions. It advances an understanding of power dynamics in urban and rural areas from the hitherto neglected vantage point of people who are most struggling to make ends meet. It pays especial attention to the deployment of a "deservingness" rationale by the welfare system that builds from the contouring of poverty vis-à-vis material living standards. It traces this to a particular ideology of change embedded in *Prospera* and reflects on the ideas and values it upholds and transmits to welfare recipients. It develops the mechanism of the "deservingness"

discourse to investigate the deployment of symbolic violence, “othering” and shame onto people in poverty who in turn appropriate and deploy it onto neighbours and others struggling to survive. The core argument is that the functioning of *Prospera* alienates the “social-being” of its beneficiaries given the type of interactions it promotes and the asymmetries of power it creates. What drives this chapter is a critical analysis of social dynamics at household and community level as well as people’s interactions with government officials that, as revealed in this research, people experienced in the form of shame, lack of voice and isolation.

This thesis advances an understanding of poverty through developing the links between the material hardships and the lived experience of poverty in urban and rural Mexico from the vantage point of social policy. To that end, it develops a theory of alienation applied to poverty by analysing the contradictions between the needs and agency of people in poverty and the welfare system in the form of CCTs. Thus, this thesis shows the extent to which the underlying rationale, design and functioning of *Prospera* contributes to trapping those in less advantageous political, economic and social conditions into poverty.

### **1.3. Limitations**

Firstly, due to space and time constraints, this thesis will focus on conditional cash transfer programmes only. It is true that the depth and scope of social policy in Mexico goes well beyond this particular type of social provision. The implications of other social programmes for the lived experiences of poverty is also worth investigating. Such examination may underscore differentiated consequences to other groups of the population such as the elderly, people with disability, or peasants. However, the social programme *Prospera* has become the flagship of poverty alleviation by the government and has been praised by international organisations as a key anti-poverty strategy, despite relatively stagnant levels of poverty in that country for the past 20 years. Furthermore, despite there being no lack of research about CCTs and *Prospera*, there is

no investigation, to the knowledge of this author, that operationalises the structural dynamics at play in poverty and its concomitant lived experience.

Secondly, there is research showing the importance of including children's voices (Lewis, 2009) in order to account for disparities of poverty according to age. Although the lack of children's voices is an important limitation of this thesis, given that a main research interest is the experience of poverty through the lens of social welfare provision, children would most likely not be aware of what *Prospera* entails for their lived reality. It could be argued that investigating the experiences of children does not necessarily require them to know what the conditionalities are or how they affect their lives and that it is the researcher's task to make the implicit link in their discourse explicit. However, the focus on adults reflects the interest in the consequences of neoliberalism on people in poverty through the lens of welfare beneficiaries. Notwithstanding, future research could focus on children's experience of conditionalities and their lived realities of navigating poverty.

Thirdly, this research excludes communities that are not in receipt of *Prospera*. Research has shown that the communities needing cash transfers the most are indeed the communities excluded from *Prospera's* support (Gollás, 2003). This is an important disadvantage for this research as it does not account for communities that are economically worse off. However, focusing on beneficiaries of *Prospera* allows us to understand the experience of people in poverty and their interaction with the welfare system and as such analyse the dynamics of neoliberalism, which is the purpose of this thesis.

Lastly, due to financial constraints this research relied on a single fieldwork visit during the summer of 2016. Therefore, it was not possible to capture the voices of people over the long term nor was it possible to expand the analysis to more communities. An investigation of the lived experiences of people across other areas of the country and through several waves of interviews may give prominence to the more nuanced dynamics at play regarding welfare provision. For instance, it could enable the

understanding of how the different changes of *Prospera* throughout the years have affected household dynamics in the allocation of resources or the type of interactions it promotes in semi-urban areas; this is a potential path for future studies.

## Chapter II Prospera

### Introduction

As the first of its kind, the conditional cash transfer programme now called *Prospera* was launched over twenty years ago in rural areas of Mexico. It started in 1997 in 456 municipalities of rural areas, supporting 404,241 families, and has continuously expanded into urban areas, now supporting over 6 million families. Its then innovative approach to poverty alleviation has gained international support and now 52 countries around the world have implemented CCT programmes (WB, 2014a).

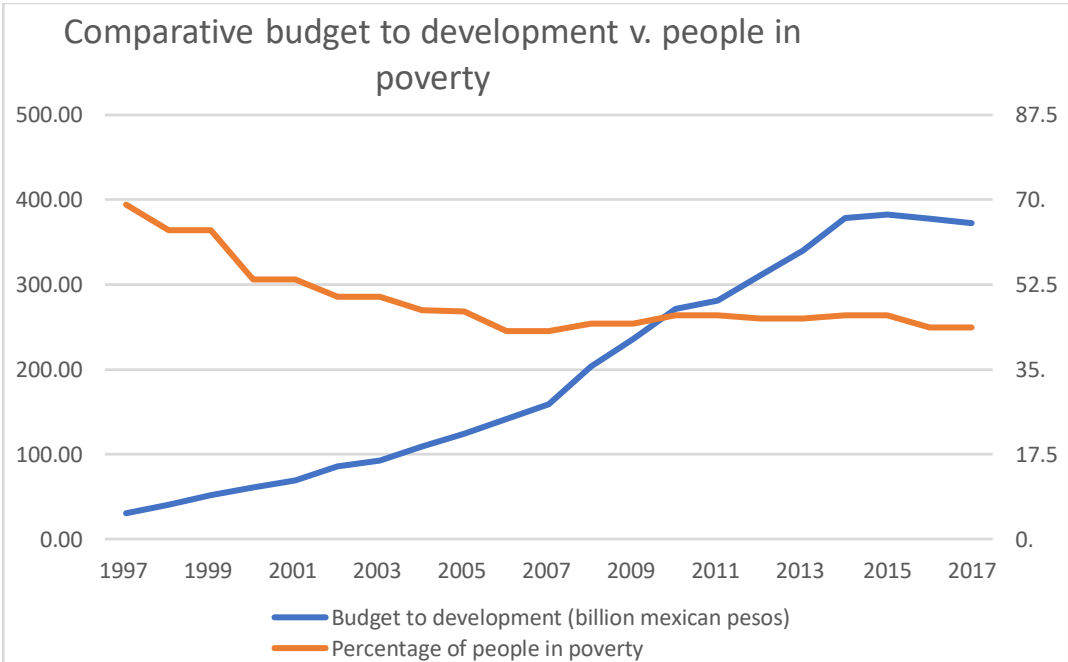
This chapter discusses the evolution, implementation and core ideas driving the main anti-poverty measure in Mexico. In so doing, it will bring forward the innovations and relevance of *Prospera* and ultimately of CCT for both the understanding of and the fight against poverty. In particular, this chapter will discuss the way in which the central tenets of *Prospera* are underpinned by an ideology of change rooted in liberal economics. Additionally, it will discuss the extent to which its mechanics and functioning have served to advance a particular understanding of poverty and concomitantly of those experiencing it. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss how, in the government's attempt to reduce the politicisation of *Prospera*, it has limited dissident voices from both internal and external evaluations of that programme. The first part traces the four waves of social policy in Mexico. Specifically, it looks at the evolution of social policy in that country to situate the role of CCT in the region and in Mexico in particular. The second part directly explains the aims, functioning and core tenets of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico. More specifically, it defines the characteristics of the three core changes of CCT there. It also discusses the links between this type of welfare provision and the advancement of ideas of self-reliance, resilience and accountability for welfare recipients. The third section analyses the different internal and external evaluations of the CCT *Prospera* programme. Furthermore, it analyses the role of the methodologically sound reports and robust statistical analysis around the impact of *Prospera* in the strengthening of CCT and as

such in the reproduction of a particular ideology of change that aligns with labour market dynamics. The final section traces the evolution of neoliberalism with regard to social policy in Mexico, with a particular emphasis on the fourth wave of social policy there. Relevant here is the role of financial institutions and their economic and ideological support to the country in the implementation, roll out and later expansion of CCTs both in Mexico and worldwide.

**2.1 The evolution of social policy: The Mexican case**

For the past two decades, one of the main characteristics of the fight against poverty by the Mexican government has been a continuous increase of budget allocation for development (Figure 1). Accordingly, the budget allotted during that period was US \$168.9 billion (SHCP, 2014). However, for the past 13 years, poverty has stagnated and has affected 53.4 million Mexicans, that is 43.6% of the total population (CONEVAL, 2016).

**Figure 1:** Budget (US\$) allocated to Development compared to % of people in poverty, 1997 – 2017



*\*Nominal expenditure*

*\*\*Patrimony line of poverty from 1997 to 2006 and from then on multidimensional poverty line as defined by CONEVAL*

*Source: Information collated from (Presidencia, 2018) and (CONEVAL, 2016)*

Back in 1997, after the *tequila crisis*<sup>1</sup> and a number of reforms, Santiago Levy<sup>2</sup> and Antonio Ponce designed the first CCT programme *Progresa*, now called *Prospera*. Ever since, the human development programme *Prospera* has become the key programme in fighting and alleviating poverty (SEDESOL, 2014). However, in order to trace its roots and underlying rationale it is essential to understand its evolution. Through the review of the social policy literature in relation to Mexico, four waves of social policy can be identified. This section outlines each one before moving on to discuss the fourth wave in more detail.

### *2.1.1. The first wave*

The definition of poverty in Mexico has gone hand in hand with the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), its concomitant consolidation of the nation-state, and the establishment of the roots of the political party that governed the country for over 71 years. It might be argued that the embeddedness of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, by its initials in Spanish) in the process of consolidating the nation-state together with the emphasis on a constitution that protected economic and social rights paved the way in the 1990's for the setting up of conditional cash transfer programmes of the sort of *Prospera*. Thus, the faith in social policy and ultimately the targeting of people experiencing poverty has been linked to the functioning and control of that one political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, by its initials in Spanish) (Villarespe, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the sudden devaluation of the Mexican peso in December 1994 that coincided with the handing over of presidency from the then President Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) to his successor Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). Because of this crisis, currencies across Latin America suffered also a decline known as the *tequila effect*.

<sup>2</sup> Current Vice President for Sectors and Knowledge of the International Development Bank (IDB).



Based on a historiographic review (Navarro, 1957; Velasco, 1943; Lorenzo, 2018), it is possible to locate the first wave of social policy between the first third of the twentieth century and the 1970s. In fact, the presidential decree of 1930 was the first formalisation of social policy. Thereafter, beneficence-type measures in effect during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century underwent great transformation. Government owned institutions such as hospitals, public schools and homelessness shelters were established. From there, the country transitioned from beneficence-led to an assistance-led approach to social provision<sup>3</sup>.

Accordingly, *“between 1930 and 1970, there was an abundance of stories written by public officials working on the assistance system highlighting the role of the liberal and secular state as a benefactor of the poor and the sick. These stories attempted the first operational definitions for the analysis of assistance”* (Lorenzo, 2018: 289). This post-revolutionary approach to poverty alleviation highlights the assistance of the State to the citizens who *“fell into disgrace”*, prevalent mainly from the 1920s to the 1940s<sup>4</sup>.

The political rationale behind the initial post-revolutionary efforts focused on strengthening the regime rather than the reduction of poverty. The goal was economic growth in order to legitimise the *“revolutionary project”*<sup>5</sup> and ultimately the government, by developing infrastructure. This in turn was largely dependent on the industrialisation process boosted by a favourable external context. At that point, the

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<sup>3</sup> A key example was the six-year plan (*“plan sexenal”* in Spanish) put in place by the then president Lázaro Cardenas. The emphasis of this plan was on the exploitation of natural resources, increasing wages, and creating jobs through industrialisation (Solis, 1975). Thus, assistance became a public obligation wherein the State was in charge of *“promoting and regulating all actions related to health and providing medical and social support to the population”* (Villarespe, 2010: 33).

<sup>4</sup> The levels of poverty during those decades are subject to debate, particularly given that there was no census nor national effort to define or evaluate poverty. However, Mexico then was fundamentally a rural country with the majority of its population still relying on the direct exploitation of natural resources. While this shifted considerably during the following decades, it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that the processes of industrialisation and trade started (Ros, 1993), which paved the way for a change in social provision, as discussed in this section.

<sup>5</sup> The main political party PRI gained legitimacy and remained in power for over twenty years by appropriating the ideals of freedom raised during and after the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

purpose of the first wave of social policy was mainly to support workers of the main political party and unions aligned to the government as opposed to targeting poverty.

However, the scarcity of resources resulting from the two World Wars established the ground for the government to start the import substitution process.<sup>6</sup> The perception then was that an economy focused on the development of manufacturing industry towards the domestic market had higher benefits than the export of primary products.

The import substitution strategy that followed the aftermath of World War II had a pro-urban dynamic, to the detriment of agricultural production. Thus, the industrialisation process had a fundamental role in the impoverishment of rural communities (Trejo et al., 2003). Notwithstanding, the economic model from the 1940s to the 1970s, better known as the “*stabilizer development*” or the “*Mexican miracle*” period, facilitated the urbanisation process and economic growth that increased inequality particularly between urban and rural areas.

With the interventionist approach to the economy that was followed during those three decades, the protection of local producers via subsidies sought to counter the dynamics of global markets. As a result, the percentage of people in poverty (food and income) steadily reduced during those years (Székely, 2005). Notwithstanding, the focus of social policy back then was mainly on the provision of health, education and jobs and the maintenance of the *status quo*.

To summarise, the main characteristic of this first wave of social policy was to provide support during times of illness; life insurance to family members in the event of death; intense educational support to peasants and working class communities through cultural centres and schools; improvement of wages; and job creation through

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<sup>6</sup> The import substitution strategy was an inward-looking industrialisation process that supported light industry focused on non-durable consumer goods. The perception was that an economy focused on the development of the manufacturing industry towards the domestic market had higher benefits than the export of primary products.

industrialisation. Similarly, during this time the working class received medical attention -albeit of low quality - through the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS by its initials in Spanish), while the unemployed (then referred to as “*the marginalised*”) were the subject of public assistance.

### 2.1.2. *The second wave*

During the first half and part of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mexican government had not advanced a clear definition of poverty nor any measure of it. Thus, any effort from the government was insufficient and the limited social spending ended up wasted on programmes of limited scope and low impact. The result of this was the lack of a clear strategy or programme targeted at reducing poverty.

However, the 1970s marked the beginning of the second wave of social policy, when the government launched the first programmes directly targeted at alleviating poverty, framed largely in terms of shortages in rural areas compared with urban areas. Accordingly, the Investment Programme for Rural Development (PIDER by its initials in Spanish) the General Coordination of the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalised Groups (COPLAMAR, by its initials in Spanish) and the Mexican Food System (SAM by its initials in Spanish) had a rationale of universalisation and a community focus.

In practice, the programme PIDER aimed to develop basic infrastructure such as water, electricity and roads in rural areas. With a similar rationale, the programmes COPLAMAR and SAM focused on productive capacity and self-sufficiency of food production respectively. COPLAMAR deployed trade of products to boost employment while SAM relied on subsidies, technology and access to supplies for harvesting grains and basic basket products.

With these three programmes, the government focused its efforts on fighting rural poverty (CEPAL, 1995) but with a narrow approach largely because of its lack of definition of poverty. These early efforts to target poverty directly received support

from international donors. For instance, the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) started supporting PIDER in 1971 (IDB, 2008). Nevertheless, despite attempts to increase investment, the programme could not create self-sustained development. Instead it focussed almost exclusively on infrastructure. Despite the process of decentralisation on social policy that these three programmes put forward in the national agenda, they were incapable of benefiting the very communities they aimed to support<sup>7</sup>.

During the 1980s Mexico, together with countries from the Latin American region, suffered the “*crisis of foreign debt*” characterised by the abrupt suspension of loans from the international financial market, which demanded the repayment of debts (Dávalos, 2005). However, countries in the region depended on those loans for their development. This was the age of macroeconomic adjustments and the ascendance of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) influence in the region; what the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) called the “*lost decade*” (CEPAL, 1996).

Thus, the 1980s for Latin America and Mexico in particular represented high rates of unemployment, the fall of real wages, and the increase of prices and interest rates. However, the main characteristic was foreign debt, and consequently the sharp decrease in flows of external financial resources for development. The reasons behind the unprecedented indebtedness in the region were twofold: the credit availability from international financial institutions rich with “*petrodollars*”<sup>8</sup> and authoritarian governments keen for easy flows of money (CEPAL, 1996).

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<sup>7</sup> The federal government established these three anti-poverty programmes during a period of economic crisis that extended to the following decade. With unemployment and inequality on the rise, the government focused on productive employment particularly in rural areas (Trejo et al., 2003). However, the growth of public deficit and inflation hindered any possibility of economic growth. Despite some advancements with regards to the identification of people in extreme poverty, income distribution worsened.

<sup>8</sup> Usually understood as “*a notional unit of currency earned by a country from the export of petroleum.*” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

The paternalistic approach to the economy coupled with the economic crises of both decades had a mixed effect on poverty. Food poverty<sup>9</sup> remained almost the same, moving from 24.3% at the beginning of the 1970s to 22.7% at the end of the 1980s, while patrimony poverty<sup>10</sup> reduced from 69.4% to 53.5% during the same period (Székely, 2005). Overall, despite the increase of 22% in the real GDP *per capita* in those years, the levels of poverty remained constant.

The second wave of social policy represented the implementation of social compensation measures such as subsidies, contingency plans of employment, and social emergency funds among others. This entailed a rearrangement of specific dimensions of social policy: objectives, scope, units of analysis, sources of finance and stakeholders (Franco, 1992). In summary, the second wave of social policy marked the first direct effort from the government to target mainly rural poverty. Through a variety of social programmes, the government invested in infrastructure, food production and technology via a heavily subsidised economy.

### 2.1.3. *The third wave*

The new role of the welfare system in the aftermath of the 1982 economic meltdown responded to pressure and lobbying from the IMF and the WB, working together with the so called “*tecnocratas*”<sup>11</sup> in government (Chamboux-Leroux and Yves, 2001). Thus,

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<sup>9</sup> Food poverty refers to the population whose per capita income is insufficient to acquire an acceptable minimum nutrition (Presidencia, 1999). It corresponds to the associated cost of acquiring a normative food basket. In other words, it refers to those households that lack enough resources to acquire the food basket, as further discussed in Appendix 9.

<sup>10</sup> Patrimony poverty refers to the population that while possessing the possibility of covering basic needs of nutrition, health and education, have a per capita income insufficient to acquire housing, clothing, footwear and transportation for each household member (Presidencia, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Originally, the term *tecnocrata* referred to government officials who relied on the scientific method as a way of solving societal issues. In the case of Mexico, young generations that studied mainly in North American Universities and trained in economics paved the way for the rise of the *tecnocratas* in that country. Nevertheless, with it came a rejection of everything that could not be measured or quantifiable. A direct result of this was a particular approach to poverty alleviation that relied mainly if not exclusively on income and direct provision of goods that still echoes to the present. For a more thorough review of the role of the *tecnocracia* in Mexico see (Rodriguez, 2014).

in Mexico the role of the state in the economy after the nationalisation of banks<sup>12</sup> and its concomitant balance of payments crisis shifted from a paternalistic to a neoliberal one. By the end of the 1980s and especially during the 1990s the main objectives of the economic policy were to reduce inflation, produce economic growth, and the introduction of structural reforms towards market logic as the guide for resource allocation. In line with the Washington Consensus, the exigencies of such logic required the rolling back of the state and disassembling the system of protection from external competition (Williamson, 2002).

The 1990s were the site of arguably the worst economic crisis in the recent history of Mexico. The increase of external liabilities, the current account deficit and dependence on capital flow to balance the short-term macroeconomic accounts paved the way for the 1994 *tequila crisis*. Furthermore, the social crisis experienced in that same year because of the social mobilisation of the *Zapatistas*<sup>13</sup> and disagreements from outside and within regarding the North American Federal Trade Agreement (NAFTA)<sup>14</sup> increased social discontent and pushed for the democratisation process (Hurtado, 2001).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In 1982, the then President of Mexico Jose Lopez announced the nationalisation of banks in an attempt to reduce the excessive profits of private banks, curb their monopoly through public money and fight inequality.

<sup>13</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1994 the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN by its initials in Spanish) with a strong indigenous base, took up arms with the intention of establishing a socialist government. As a result, the federal government sent the army to suppress the movement and after 11 days of confrontation, both EZLN and the government started conversations. This upheaval resulted in structural changes aimed at democratising the political system in Mexico (Hurtado, 2011), which facilitated the change in government 6 years later that led the right-wing political party National Action Party (PAN) to take over the presidency from 2000 to 2012.

<sup>14</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1994, the North American Federal Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force. In an attempt to liberalise the economy, the tripartite agreement between Canada, Mexico and the United States of America aimed to promote free trade by eliminating the majority of customs barriers and ease the circulation of goods and services among those nations (TLCAN, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> The demands of the market drove changes in social policy, the decentralisation of the economy and changes in the electoral process (Lawson, 2004). However, those changes also served as pressure valves for society and the media, helping governments to gain legitimacy and obtain prestige at the global sphere. Largely, the strategy of using social policy for political purposes gained momentum during these years and the impact of it echoes to the present, as chapter five analyses.

Alongside the economic shifts, political turmoil hit the country during the second half of the 1980s. In 1988 for the first time, a left-wing party faced and “*de facto*” defeated the long-standing political party PRI. However, the burning of ballots during that presidential election and rampant corruption meant that PRI retained power, thus generating a strong legitimacy crisis (Bizberg, 2005). As a result, the government machinery deployed a new kind of social policy as a way to gain legitimacy; that same year the then President Salinas de Gortari launched the National Programme of Solidarity (PRONASOL by its initials in Spanish) that marked the ascendance of the third wave of social policy.

This programme differed from its predecessors in three ways. Firstly, unlike the traditional post-revolutionary approach to social policy based on universalisation and development of communities, this new type of social policy was based on a market rationale. Hence, the programme PRONASOL used a targeted strategy where the units of intervention were individuals instead of communities. Accordingly, its goal was to promote welfare through subsidies and increase production and infrastructure through the decentralisation of resources.

Secondly, for the first time, the government highlighted co-responsibility between government and society as a core principle of social policy. It relied on traditional forms of organisations that rested on communal collaboration<sup>16</sup> to encourage society’s participation. Its focus was on indigenous communities, peasants and people in rural and urban areas.

Thirdly, unlike its predecessors, PRONASOL changed the dynamic between state and society; for the first time it developed a national strategy that involved the federal, municipal and local government, civil society, centralised and decentralised

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of these are the “*tequio*” in the State of Oaxaca, the “*sulaltequetl*” in Milpa Alta and “*fajinas*” in the State of Puebla. All of them are forms of unpaid work that members of community perform in exchange for the favour and support received from the community. Originally used in pre-colonial times for the construction of channels and temples they were later deployed in colonial times as forms of mandatory tribute from indigenous people to the representatives of the Spanish crown.

public institutions. This fundamentally altered the political landscape that paved the way for the ascendance of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico.

Notwithstanding this, levels of poverty have evidenced the failure of social policy across these eras. Poverty in the 1990s first flattened (from 21.4% in 1992 to 21.2% in 1994 of people experiencing food poverty and from 53.1% in 1992 to 52.4% in 1994 of people in patrimonial poverty) and then peaked (reaching 37.4% of food poverty and 69% of patrimonial poverty in 1996) (CONEVAL, 2015). These trends signalled the devastating effects of the *tequila crisis*, the coming into force of NAFTA and the inability of social programmes to alleviate poverty which was capitalised on by the subsequent government when they set in motion conditional cash transfer programmes.

In summary, the third wave set a precedent in social programmes by establishing a targeted approach as opposed to a universalistic one, including all levels of government (federal, state and municipal) and changing the state-society relationship by including civil society in the execution and follow-up of the programme. Finally, it heavily relied on subsidies and investment in infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.

#### *2.1.4. The fourth wave*

The ascendance of the fourth wave of social policy went hand in hand with the democratisation process, the liberalisation of the Mexican economy to the global market, and times of great need given the consequences of the economic crisis of 1994. The then President of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo, established a type of welfare provision that consisted of providing cash to households in exchange for certain actions related to health, nutrition and education. This very simple idea devised by Santiago Levy and Antonio Ponce during the 1990s and put into practice in 1997 revolutionised social policy in the years to come.



There were four reasons for the decision to put in motion this type of welfare provision (Appendix 1). The fourth wave of social policy focused on the individual and their development through insertion in the labour market. The result of this was a change in the form as well as in the depth of the fight against poverty.

**Table 1:** Social policy waves in Mexico, 1960s to date

Wave	Example of programme	Type of strategies	Rationale	Goal
1 <sup>st</sup> wave	Plan sexenal (six year plan)	Industrialisation, public health care, training of peasants.	Universalisation. Focus on government employees and unions.	Economic growth, development of infrastructure, increased wages.
2 <sup>nd</sup> wave	PIDER 1972-1976	Basic infrastructure.	Universalisation. Community-focus.	Improve sewerage, water, electricity, roads, etc. in rural areas.
	COPLAMAR 1977-1979	Employment through trade of products.	Universalisation. Community-focus.	Promote the productive capacity of marginalised sectors.
	SAM 1980-1987	Subsidies, technology and access to supplies for harvesting and trade of grains, and basic basket products.	Universalisation. Community-focus.	Promote self-sufficiency of food production.
3 <sup>rd</sup> wave	PRONASOL 1988-1996	Link beneficiary communities in the execution and follow up of the programme. Decentralisation of resources. Subsidies	Targeted Individual-focus	Welfare, Production, Infrastructure.
4 <sup>th</sup> wave	<i>Progresas/Oportunidades/ Prospera</i> 1997-to date	Cash transfers conditional on specific education and health related behaviours.	Targeted Individual-focus/households	Human capital formation (health, education, nutrition) Break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Table 1 depicts the evolution of welfare provision by the Mexican state from the early steps of the government's attempt to fight the structural causes of inequality and poverty to its more tailored emphasis on poverty alleviation through human capital formation as previously discussed. The breaking point during the 1990s signals the

emphasis placed by international experts, financial institutions and government officials on a narrow type of social policy focused on facilitating the dynamics of the (labour) market, as discussed in what follows.

The paradigm shift from universalisation to tailored social policy reflects the government's focus on reducing the role of the state in the economy and societal issues, and it emphasises the importance of a market-oriented rationale thereafter. The liberalisation of the economy and the wave of privatisations of formerly government owned companies such as telecommunications and electricity evidenced that shift.<sup>17</sup> From the vantage point of society, the underlying rationale was that individuals would be free from state intervention and thus capable of fully accessing the goods and products of a globalised economy.

To summarise, the economic and political changes from the 1980s to the 1990s previously referred to also represent a rupture on the role of the state vis-à-vis society. Accordingly, the state was no longer the single provider of resources and services for the satisfaction of communal needs and instead it became an enabler of individual capacities to access the spill over benefits of globalisation. In that sense, and to that extent, the discussion about human entitlements characteristic of the post-revolutionary state<sup>18</sup> transitioned into a discussion of citizenship. Since then this has become the hallmark of social policy and the fight against poverty in Mexico. Finally, as illustrated in Table 1, the change in the unit of analysis from the community to the household represented the zenith of change in welfare provision thenceforth focused

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<sup>17</sup> Rapid technological advancement and globalisation pushed the dynamics of the market at the forefront of developing economies (Escobar, 1999) to the degree of making calls to let private investments flow into government owned companies legitimate vis-à-vis stakeholders. Furthermore, the structural incapacity of such companies to compete with the global market, their lengthy bureaucratic processes to allow for increases in funding and the fixed prices by the government, made evident for both international donors and government officials the need for privatisation. The expected result was that the demand would allow the prices to adjust at international levels, thus making competitors improve the service and constantly invest in new technologies. The result of that was the privatisation of over 150 public companies during the 1980s and several companies considered priority during the 1990s such as telecommunications, electricity, banks, railways, airports among others (Sacristan, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> This was the perspective of Mexican philosopher and advocate of public education Jose Vasconcelos, especially during his early years. For a better understanding of his main political and philosophical ideas, see (Vasconcelos, 1948).

on enabling the individual's capacity to participate in the economy. Thus, these changes meant a shift in strategies and as such, the expected outcomes and ultimately the content of social policy.

## **2.2. The fourth wave of social policy: the ascendance of CCT**

The political content of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico has its roots in neo-classical economics and the assumptions that underpin neoliberal ideology. This was evident in the way that its designers brought together the principles of the free market, no state intervention, and freedom of choice by individuals as key tenets driving social provision, as the following section investigates. Thus, with CCT the ultimate expected outcome of social policy was to "*grease the gears*" of the local economy by levelling the field for "*the extreme poor*" through human capital formation for their absorption into the labour market. In turn, this would allow them to participate as active consumers in order to boost the economy.

The changes within CCT in Mexico have gone hand-in-hand with recommendations from external evaluations and regional trends in social policy (Behrman and Skoufias, 2006) as well as political arrangements and changes in government. There have been three stages of CCT in that country. Understanding the processes behind each one is relevant to analysing the current stage of the CCT programme *Prospera*, which is ultimately the purpose in what follows.

### *2.2.1. First stage: Progres a (1997-2000)*

In 1997, the then President Ernesto Zedillo released the CCT programme then called "*Programme of Education, Health and Nutrition, Progres a*" in an attempt to set his government apart from the previous one. Santiago Levy and Antonio Ponce, the masterminds behind it, envisioned bringing together economic analysis with the design of social policy in that country. They proposed to revolutionise welfare provision by advancing the idea that people and, as a result, societies would flourish if all members of society had a "*level playing field*" to compete in the labour market. For that, the focus

would be on developing the human capital of the lowest decile of the economy through incentives in three core areas: health, education and nutrition.

Hence, its ultimate aim was to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty through the development of human capital. To that end, it *began* as a piloting project in rural areas of 10 out of 31 states in Mexico. In the words of President Ernesto Zedillo at the inauguration of the first CCT programme (Presidencia, 1997: 1):

*“Today we start a programme to break with the vicious cycle of ignorance, of disease, of squalor and malnourishment that has trapped in poverty millions of Mexicans. For the first time the Government of the Republic puts in motion a programme that will target the causes of poverty in an integrated manner. With Progresa we will put together actions of education, health and nutrition, for the poorest families in Mexico, focusing attention on households and male and female children...”*

These words put forward the change in language and approach to poverty and in particular the change in the framing of *“the poor”*, as discussed in the last part of this section. Furthermore, his words underline the assumed role of the government with regard to poverty alleviation, from one focused on infrastructure to one designed to nurture human capital formation. Thus, for *Progresa* the understanding of poverty shifted from structural causes to individual capacities to escape poverty.

*Progresa* carefully selected households through a series of surveys. It moved from supporting just over 400,000 households in 1997 to over 2 million families in 1999.<sup>19</sup> Its focus was households because that *“reflected the recognition of the importance... of each one of its members and the union and necessary integration in order to face, with greater strength, the challenges of life”* (*Progresa*, 1999: 7). Furthermore, it aimed to benefit women in particular in order to promote gender equality. Accordingly, *“in all cases, it is sought that the mother of the family be the owner of the economic benefits directed to the household”* (*Progresa*: 1999: 7). The three main components of *Progresa*

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<sup>19</sup> For a revision of the selection process used by *Progresa* see *Progresa* (2000).

were nutrition, education and health (Appendix 2), which have continued up to the present and are further explained in what follows. A key element developed by *Progresa* was the creation of the *spokesperson* role. These were volunteer beneficiaries that functioned as links between the programme and other beneficiaries. They were elected by the rest of the beneficiaries in the community, received no economic compensation, and periodically gathered to receive training. Their role was to help other beneficiaries so that “*they have the required information to comply with their co-responsibilities and for the good use of the support from the programme to improve the health and the education of households*” (*Progresa*, 1999: 23).

Another innovation established by *Progresa* was the liaison person at the municipal level. These were programme representatives in charge of assuring the effective functioning of the programme. In particular, they were responsible for handling the nutritional supplements, following up the cash deliveries and supporting beneficiaries in case of exclusion or problems regarding their benefits.

Those first years of CCT in Mexico coincided with a considerable reduction of poverty. Food poverty fell from 37.4% in 1996 to 24.1% in 2000 and income poverty passed from 69% to 53% in the same period (CONEVAL, 2015b). However, these trends signal the settling down of the 1994 economic crisis. Additionally, they emphasise the more favourable political and social environment resulting from the democratisation processes started during those years.

*Progresa* pioneered a form of social provision that gave cash to welfare recipients in exchange for certain conditions attached to health, nutrition and education. The logic of activation behind this approach meant people were ultimately responsible for remaining in or exiting poverty. This rationale has been the core of all three stages of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico as discussed in the following section.

To summarise, the first stage of CCT in Mexico had rural households (the “*extreme poor*”<sup>20</sup>) as its unit of analysis. It provided free basic health care, promoted access to basic education and gave food supplements and a small fixed stipend to its welfare recipients. Furthermore, and in order to reduce gender inequality, it targeted female heads of households as direct recipients of the cash transfers and in turn made them the main actors responsible for compliance, which has been a core part of CCT throughout the years as discussed in what follows.

### 2.2.2. Second stage: *Oportunidades* (2000-2012)

In 2000, the then President of Mexico Vicente Fox decided to rebrand CCT to mark the ascendance to power of a different political party for the first time in 71 years. Despite that change, the political synergy around CCT coupled with its international support granted the continuation and extension of this type of social provision. The change in name from *Progresa* to “*Programme of Human Development, Oportunidades*” went hand in hand with some amendments. Nevertheless, it remained fundamentally the same, supporting households in poverty via cash transfers and provision of services related to health, nutrition and education (Appendix 3). *Oportunidades* included semi-urban and urban areas, which represented a change in the selection process. Initially with *Progresa*, all people living in beneficiary rural areas were recipients of support.<sup>21</sup> The expansion of CCT and the selection process are two elements praised by internal and external evaluations as analysed in the following section.

Furthermore, it required beneficiaries to attend talks, workshops, health care checks, students to attend to school, and the whole family to attend to health care checks as per their general practitioner’s instructions. The programme monitored completion of these responsibilities through doctors, nurses, teachers and programme representatives who supervised attendance and participation at health clinics and

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<sup>20</sup> The still nascent official definition of poverty of the 1990’s considered people in rural areas as people experiencing extreme poverty and often referred to them as the “*extreme poor*”.

<sup>21</sup> For a further revision of the selection process followed by *Oportunidades* see (DOF, 2011).

schools. Failing to comply with any of those conditions resulted in the temporary or definitive suspension of benefits.

As with *Progresa*, *Oportunidades* relied on the liaison person at municipal level and the spokespersons. With *Oportunidades*, these two roles remained almost intact. Spokespersons were mainly volunteer beneficiary women democratically elected by other beneficiaries of the community. Their role was to receive direct training from the programme and make sure the information reached the rest of beneficiaries. Furthermore, they were in charge of signing attendance sheets of children at school and attendance sheets of households at health care centres; liaising with programme representatives and advocating for the interest of their fellow beneficiaries and guaranteeing that other beneficiaries complied with the conditions attached to the programme. In the case of the liaison person at municipal level, their role was to receive complaints from beneficiaries, ensure the programme functioned according to the rules of operation, and ultimately be the interface between *Oportunidades* and beneficiaries. These two roles have permitted the operation of CCT in Mexico and their functions have been crucial to its development, as analysed in the following section.

During the years of *Oportunidades* (2000 to 2012), the Mexican government established the first official definition of poverty and the first decentralised public organisation in charge of evaluating and measuring poverty, as analysed in the following chapter. During those twelve years, poverty had some considerable fluctuations. At the beginning of 2000, food poverty was at 24.1%, then dropped to 14% in 2006, and increased to 19.7% in 2012. Similarly, income poverty moved from 53% in 2000, to 46.9% in 2006 and reached 52.3% in 2012. These trends persisted despite an unprecedented budget allocated to poverty alleviation, and the roll out and strengthening of CCT.

In summary, the second stage of CCT in Mexico expanded to semi-urban and rural areas, growing from 300 thousand households in 1997 with *Progresa* to covering 5.8 million households in 2012. It also increased the scope of scholarships to secondary

level and college, increased the amount provided per year and with a relatively higher support to female students from the first year of secondary school. It expanded support to the elderly, improved the quality of the nutritional supplement given to children from 0 to 5 years old and pregnant and nursing women. Finally, it continued the support provided in relation to health at health care centres via training to beneficiary women and subjecting benefits to attendance at schools and clinics.

### 2.2.3. Third stage: *Prospera* (2012-present)

After 12 years of government by the right-wing political party PAN, the centre-right political party PRI returned to power. The growing levels of inequality, poverty and in particular the rapidly expanding violence in the country largely explain the results of the presidential elections of 2012. In an attempt to legitimise the re-ascendance of PRI the incoming President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, looked to revolutionise welfare provision by strengthening CCT, increasing its links with other social programmes and facilitating access to other services by beneficiaries. To that end, and in an attempt to mark the change in government, Peña Nieto changed the name from *Oportunidades* to “*Social Inclusion Programme, Prospera*”.

The National Coordination of *Prospera* collects demographic and socioeconomic information on households through the Survey of Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households (CUIS-ENCASEH, by its initials in Spanish)<sup>22</sup>. With that information, the programme *Prospera* targets households whose estimated monthly income per capita is below the minimum wellbeing threshold (LBMa, by its initials in Spanish)<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, households whose income falls below the Line of Permanent Verifications

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<sup>22</sup> For a thorough explanation of the process of selection and prioritisation of communities that *Prospera* uses, see (DOF, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> According to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, by its initials in Spanish) “*The wellbeing threshold makes it possible to identify the population that does not have sufficient resources to acquire the necessary goods and services to satisfy its needs (food and non-food). The minimum wellbeing threshold makes it possible to identify the population that, even when using all of its income to purchase food, cannot acquire enough of it to ensure adequate nutrition*” (CONEVAL, 2010b: 6).



of Socioeconomic Conditions (LVPCS by its initials in Spanish)<sup>24</sup> are eligible to remain as beneficiaries.

As with its predecessors, the way *Prospera* works is through health, nutrition and education components. In relation to nutrition, beneficiaries continued receiving the nutritional package bi-monthly that included a highly nutritive supplement<sup>25</sup> for newly born and children until the age of five as well as for pregnant and nursing women. Additionally, it provided cash supports to account for inflation and targeted to improve the nutrition of household members.

In relation to the health component, it continued previous support via the basic health care package of *Progresa* and *Oportunidades* but extended it from 13 to 27 diseases covered<sup>26</sup> via health clinics that were run by the Ministry of Health.<sup>27</sup> For cases of diseases that *Prospera* did not cover, health clinics referred beneficiaries to specialised hospitals as per the General Law of Health and the Social Security Law (DOF, 2017).

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<sup>24</sup> The National Coordination of *Prospera* defines this line as the monetary value in which a household that has enough estimated income to cover the food basket, has similar conditions in educational lags, lack of access to health and access to food than households whose estimated income is lower than the LBMa. (CONEVAL, 2015a).

<sup>25</sup> The Mexican government has made a continuous effort to improve the quality of the nutritional supplements. For an analysis about the impact of the nutrition supplements see García-Guerra et al. (2009); Leroy et al. (2008).

<sup>26</sup> The Guaranteed Basic Package covers 27 different types of intervention. It aims to promote health via self-care training, individualise guidance and counselling and issuing collective messages addressed to beneficiary households adjusted by age, sex and life cycle. For second and third level health care support as well as in the case of emergencies, the health practitioner refers beneficiaries to specialised care units, which the basic service does not cover. However, the Federal Government agreed to gradually include beneficiaries of *Prospera* in the Health Care Social Protection System "*Seguro Popular*" that offers free medical-surgical and pharmaceutical services, in an attempt to provide them with free health care. "*Seguro Popular*" covers 1,807 diseases of first and second level health care support, and all diseases of children up to 5 years old. For a revision of the functioning and scope of "*Seguro Popular*" see (Nigenda et al., 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Due to political conflicts, in Mexico City beneficiaries of *Prospera* access health care through *ad hoc* health clinics. This has been the case because the ruling political party in Mexico City differs from the ruling political party at federal level. For a broader discussion about the primary health care system in Mexico see WHO (2017).

*Prospera* also continued monitoring the health of households through doctors' appointments (Table 2) and aimed to improve household members' health through workshops and talks focused on self-care, nutritional education, disease prevention and adherence to the treatment of patients with chronic diseases. In the case of doctors' appointments, general practitioners or nurses took anthropometric measures of beneficiaries, monitored the growth of children and the development of pregnant and nursing women and assessed their nutritional status.

In the case of community workshops for health self-care, the public health sector defined their content and scope. These could vary from state to state, or from region to region according to the particular epidemiological risks or seasonal illness. However, some topics generally covered were nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, personal hygiene, prevention of addictions and violence, diversity, equity and gender (Appendix 4). Workshops took place on average once every month at the health clinic. Health care professionals, coordinated these workshops together with programme representatives and sought to actively engage beneficiaries in the provision of information via an oral presentation of a topic previously selected. Through its liaison person *Prospera* encouraged beneficiaries to attend with the support of flipcharts, drawings, and other sort of visual representations. After beneficiaries' presentations, spokespersons and programme representatives summarised the key "*take home messages*" from all the presentations, noted attendance and summoned beneficiaries to the following talk or workshop.

**Table 2:** Appointments according to age, gender and life cycles

Age group	Frequency of check-ups
Newborn	At birth, 7 and 28 days
Infants and children under 5 years of age	At 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54 and 60 months of age
Children and teenagers aged 5 to 19 years of age	One every six months
Adults over 20 years of age	Every six months
Pregnant women	A minimum of five check-ups Starting ideally before the 12 week of pregnancy, according to the following schedule 1st appointment-between the 1st and the 12th week 2nd appointment-between the 22nd and the 24th week 3rd appointment-between the 27th and the 29th week

	4th appointment-between the 33rd and the 35th week 5th appointment-between the 38th and the 40th week
Post-partum period	7, 28 and 42 days

Source: (Dávila, 2016: 33)

In the case of the talks, the purpose was to provide educational messages, information, guidance and counselling in health-related issues that health professionals supplied during beneficiaries' attendance at the health clinic. With these talks, *Prospera* reinforced information provided during health consultations and provided specific recommendations tailored to further promoting self-care of health. Talks took place on average once every month at the health clinic. The difference between the workshops and the talks was that in the former beneficiaries were in charge of transmitting the information to other beneficiaries, whereas in the latter it was the health care professionals who provided the information.

With both workshops and talks *Prospera* sought to change the behaviour of welfare recipients, alter social dynamics and change the disposition of beneficiaries towards the reception of information that it deemed relevant. At every talk, workshop and visit to a health clinic *Prospera* - through health care practitioners and programme representatives - reminded beneficiaries about the importance of adhering to their programme and complying in order to be good parents and citizens and thus escape poverty. Furthermore, with its conditionalities, *Prospera* aimed to emphasise the importance of human capital formation in their capacity to exit poverty, improve their living conditions and ultimately ameliorate social relations.

In relation to the education component, *Prospera* increased the amounts of scholarships (Table 3) and started offering scholarships for higher education in public institutions via the Ministry of Education. It also included scholarships for children and teenagers with disabilities so that they could continue with their education. *Prospera* provided these scholarships on a bi-monthly basis during the 10 months of the academic year. In addition to the scholarships, it provided cash support for school supplies for children studying in primary and secondary education and college, as well

as for children enrolled in special education schools. In all cases, *Prospera* made cash transfers of scholarships on a bi-monthly basis.

One of the key advances of *Prospera* in relation to its predecessor, was to include the right to a hearing. With this, and for the first time, beneficiaries had the opportunity to raise their voice individually against an unjust reduction of benefits or unjustified withdrawal from the programme. While the two previous stages of CCT included a bureaucratic procedure for formally filing a complaint, with *Prospera* beneficiaries had the opportunity of directly speaking with a programme representative in one of the main offices of the programme to express their concerns, present physical evidence and demand their benefits or programme back.

**Table 3:** Bi-monthly scholarships in three stages of CCT

Item	<i>Progresa</i>	<i>Oportunidades</i>	<i>Prospera</i>
<b>Scholarships primary school</b>			
1 <sup>st</sup> year (only in communities with less than 2,5000 inhabitants)	-	£6.50	£6.70
2 <sup>nd</sup> year (only in communities with less than 2,5000 inhabitants)	-	£6.50	£6.70
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	£3.10	£6.50	£6.70
4 <sup>th</sup> year	£3.70	£7.60	£8
5 <sup>th</sup> year	£4.90	£9.80	£10.40
6 <sup>th</sup> year	£6.40	£12.90	£13.70
<b>Scholarships secondary school</b>			
First year			
Male	£9.40	£18.80	£20.20
Female	£9.80	£20	£21.20
Second year			
Male	£9.80	£20	£21.20
Female	£10.90	£22.10	£23.50
Third year			
Male	£10.30	£20.90	£22.30
Female	£11.90	£24.30	£25.90
<b>Scholarships College</b>			
First year			
Male	-	£31.70	£33.90
Female	-	£36.40	£38.80
Second year			
Male	-	£34.10	£36.30
Female	-	£39	£41.40
Third year			
Male	-	£36.20	£38.40

Female	-	£41.30	£44
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\*Exchange rate \$25.5 mexican pesos = £1

Source: DOF, 2017

With *Prospera*, the government sought to increase the scope of CCT via financial and productive inclusion with a gender focus. In terms of financial inclusion, *Prospera* opened access to credit to its beneficiaries. Together with the Office for the Treasury and Public Credit,<sup>28</sup> it developed a scheme of financial support tailored to beneficiaries of *Prospera* through which they could access credit at zero commission for opening or maintaining an account at a low interest rate together with a free financial insurance.

In terms of productive inclusion, *Prospera* facilitated training for work. Jointly with the Ministry of Education, it started providing scholarships aimed at getting training for work for its beneficiaries. It gave its beneficiaries preferential access to the national job centre. It facilitated their access to a saving scheme for women and liaised with 15 programmes<sup>29</sup> for employment that *Prospera* made accessible to its beneficiaries.

One of the key elements pushed by CCT in fighting poverty is the creation of co-responsibilities on welfare recipients. However, in 2009 the federal government developed the Food Support Programme (PAL, by its initials in Spanish) that consisted of a cash transfer without conditions attached. Due to the scope of *Prospera*, PAL later became part of it, inasmuch as recipients of this food support programme received it under the brand of *Prospera*, despite it having no conditionalities.

Similarly, *Prospera* absorbed the Elderly programme begun in 2006, which gave money and support to those over the age of 65<sup>30</sup>. The absorption of other social

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<sup>28</sup> The Office for the Treasury and Public Credit is the Finance Ministry of Mexico, and is the public institution in charge of proposing economic policy related to tax, finances, income and public debt.

<sup>29</sup> For a definition of how the productive inclusion of *Prospera* works see DOF (2018).

<sup>30</sup> Discontinuation of support for senior citizens can take place in two ways. First, an indefinite discontinuation if the senior citizens cannot certify co-responsibility every two months. Second, a permanent discontinuation if this happens in two or more consecutive semesters. The permanent suspension can occur in case of dead, change of address or if the senior citizen is beneficiary of another social program called "*SEDESOL's Pension Scheme for Senior Citizens*" (IDB, 2016).

programmes and incorporation of new features reflects the perceived efficiency of *Prospera* in reaching vulnerable populations (Rivera, 2004), allegedly because it had not been subject to the shifts in political power, thus avoiding politicisation. Notwithstanding, the growing “*all-encompassing*” approach of *Prospera* jeopardises its purpose (Levy, 2008)<sup>31</sup>.

The absorption of PAL and the Elderly programme by *Prospera* was not a change in the rationale behind it. Rather, it was part of the increasing influence of CCT in the Mexican welfare system to the extent of becoming the single most important social programme to such a degree that the government has been “*hanging [other social programmes] on it as if on a Christmas tree*” (Levy, 2008), that is providing other social programmes through *Prospera*. Notwithstanding, conditional money has remained *Prospera’s* distinctive feature for poverty alleviation.

To monitor compliance, *Prospera* relied on health clinics, public education institutions, regional liaison persons, promoters and spokespersons. Health clinics and health care professionals were crucial in monitoring the health of beneficiaries, providing talks, organising workshops and certifying compliance with health related conditionalities. The health and nutrition component of *Prospera* operated because of its links with the Ministry of Health, and its different branches at local level.

In the case of public education institutions and teachers, their role was fundamental in monitoring the learning process of children, providing school supplies and certifying compliance with educational related conditionalities. As such, the education component of *Prospera* was possible because of its links with the Ministry of Education and local schools. Thus, the two pillars on which *Prospera* rested were health clinics and public education institutions (Figure 2).

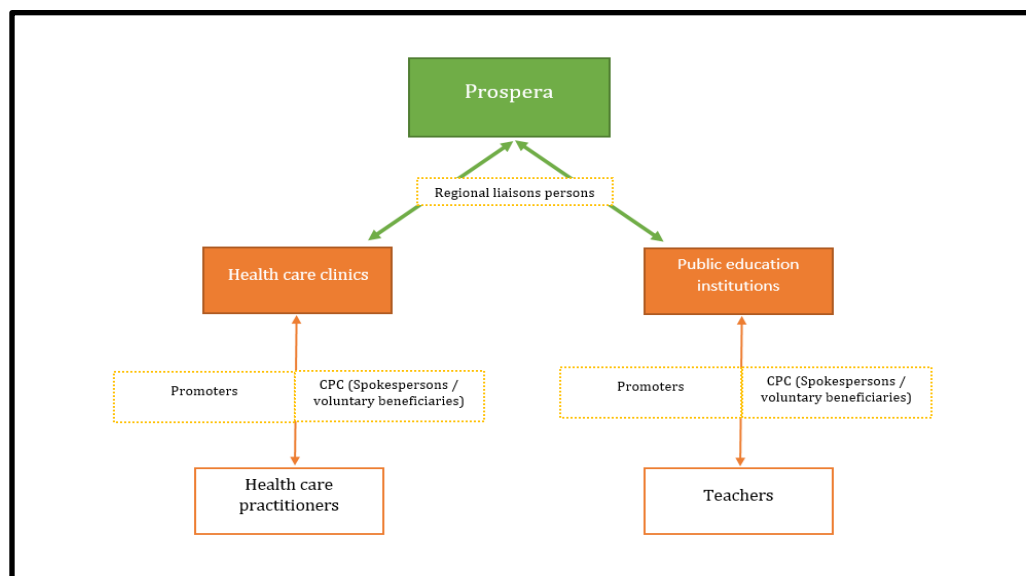
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<sup>31</sup> This is, for instance, the approach by the Mexican policy maker Santiago Levy, who designed the CCT programme *Prospera* and has critically commented on the current approach by the Mexican government of relying on *Prospera* to provide many other social programmes, which on his view harms and ultimately risks defeating the purpose of *Prospera*. See (Levy, 2018).

The regional liaison persons were in charge of guaranteeing the correct administrative functioning of *Prospera*. In particular, their role was to make sure all paperwork and processes followed *Prospera's* rules of operation, and keep the health clinics and public education institutions up-to-date about amendments of the programme. Furthermore, they received, reviewed and ultimately approved attendance sheets for workshops, talks, health clinic visits and school enrolment and attendance.

The promoters were programme representatives on the ground. Their function was to update *Prospera* about problems regarding the provision of health, nutrition and education components in the localities. They helped in the organisation of workshops, provided information to beneficiaries and supported them with any day to day issues arising from their benefits. Additionally, they were intermediaries between health care professionals and beneficiaries and between teachers and beneficiaries.

**Figure 2:** Functioning of *Prospera*



Source: self-elaborated

*Prospera* advanced its community focus through the Community Promotion Committees (CPC) formed by volunteer beneficiaries, better known as spokespersons,

that were democratically elected by other beneficiaries in a locality (borough). CPCs were the mechanism for beneficiaries to ensure the proper operation of *Prospera*. Accordingly, the responsibilities of the spokespersons were to follow up and ensure compliance with goals and actions of the programme and oversee correct application of public resources. Furthermore, they provided links between beneficiary households, programme representatives and government officials. Ultimately, their role was to encourage community participation and ensure a transparent operation of *Prospera*.

While the role of spokespersons did not entail any payment, *Prospera* approved a bi-monthly monetary support of £2.80 (\$70 Mexican pesos), paid to compensate for all the actions they carried out supporting households and the community, subject to active participation in the CPC and compliance with their own conditionalities. As part of their responsibilities, spokespersons ensured sufficient, accurate and timely distribution of information about *Prospera* to beneficiaries. Particularly relevant was their role making sure beneficiaries complied with their conditionalities according to the rules of *Prospera*. They also monitored compliance with the delivery of cash transfers and transparency in the exercise of public resources, and made sure authorities dealt with complaints from beneficiaries. Furthermore, they kept a record of their activities, assisted with training beneficiaries and followed up the resolution of complaints. Lastly, they had the responsibility of taking part in all of the CPC's activities.

As previously noted, the key feature of *Prospera* has been the provision of cash conditional on certain actions from its recipients (Table 4). Accordingly, heads of households were required to attend monthly workshops and talks, children to go to school, and all family members to attend health clinic appointments usually twice every six months<sup>32</sup>. The fact that the majority of programme holders were women created

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<sup>32</sup> The number of appointments with health practitioners depended on the needs of the household, seasonal disease and local characteristics. Nevertheless, the minimum amount of household appointments at the health clinic are two per year.



dynamics that increased their time spent complying with those conditions, as analysed in chapter four.

**Table 4:** Conditionalities per component

Component	Conditions attached
Nutrition Health	Health care appointments Talks Workshops
Education	Enrolment in school Attendance to school Use of cash for education related needs
Community support (only in rural areas)	Voluntary actions in the community ("faenas")

Also, as part of the conditionalities, pregnant and nursing women had to attend monthly clinic visits. The health clinic visits by mothers (sometimes with their children) took place in periods that spanned from one appointment every two months to two appointments three times per month depending on the needs identified by health care practitioners. Furthermore, *Prospera* required beneficiaries of school age to attend school, and to have their school supplies and uniforms in good condition. *Prospera* monitored attendance at both schools and health clinics through lists that teachers, health care practitioners and spokespersons signed.

For beneficiaries to receive their monetary support, state offices of *Prospera* informed heads of households at least three days in advance of the date, location and schedule in which they had to collect their support. Spokespersons in partnership with promoters and liaison personnel supported in the dissemination of such information. Attendance at these collection days was the only way for beneficiaries to receive their cash transfers, which took place once every two months.

An element that was exclusive to rural areas was the voluntary social actions called "*faenas*". There, beneficiary women performed monthly activities that included cleaning the streets, painting public spaces, refurbishing the local school or the local

health clinic, planting or mowing the grass. Although these “*faenas*” were not officially mandatory (i.e. attached as conditions of their benefits), government officials and representatives of *Prospera* often conditioned and in fact withdrew benefits based on attendance at these voluntary activities. This arose, as chapter six analyses, because of *Prospera*’s embeddedness in the local dynamics of rural areas and the asymmetries of power it promoted.

As previously referenced, women were at the centre of the programme. The assumption was that allotting a budget to women instead of men resulted in an increased return and several comparative advantages (Winters and Chiodi, 2011). Furthermore, it assumed that women use money more efficiently than men do. According to this view, women use income for the benefit of household, compared to men who use money for personal advantage (Fernald et al, 2009) and ‘vicious’ behaviours such as drinking and smoking.

There were three types of suspensions from *Prospera*. The first was a monthly suspension of support. The monthly suspension of the health component support occurred when households did not attend health clinic visits, talks or workshops. The monthly suspension of the education component took place when there were four or more unjustified absences from school. In both cases, *Prospera* reactivated the cash support once beneficiaries started complying with conditionalities. In case of unjustified reduction of benefits, and after justification, *Prospera* retroactively gave cash transfers back to households usually after a 6-month period.

The second form was the undefined suspension of benefits. *Prospera* withdrew the totality of cash support for an undefined period when twice in a row a household missed an appointment to collect their benefits, when there was a lack of transactions in a bank account for over 4 months, when there were inconsistencies of information received from the household or it was impossible to collect sociodemographic information from a beneficiary household, or in the case of removal of a household from the system of beneficiaries. Additionally, *Prospera* removed from its system of support

households that did not comply with their health related conditionalities over four continuous months or six discontinuous months.

The third form was when *Prospera* unsubscribed and suspended benefits definitively. The education component support definitively stopped when beneficiaries of school age had received scholarships for higher education for four years, and all their benefits stopped when households no longer complied with any of their conditionalities. Suspension of benefits took place when households no longer met the wellbeing threshold (LBMa), and the programme unsubscribed households when they chose to give the programme up, provided forged documents or false information, tried to use their benefits for political purposes or attempted to sell their nutritional supplements.

With a focus on gender, beneficiary women who received benefits<sup>33</sup> as heads of households<sup>34</sup> were in charge of overseeing the completion of conditionalities and they were largely the ones on whom the responsibilities of the programme fell. Additionally, the logic of attempting to balance inequalities between men and women underpinned the attempt to empower women through cash by *Prospera*, for which it supported women with higher stipends than men from junior high school onwards (Appendix 5). However, in an attempt to generate self-reliance in its beneficiaries, through surveillance of behaviour, *Prospera* in fact reproduced gender inequalities and social dynamics of exploitation, as analysed in chapters four and five.

Overall, the main objective of the *Prospera* programme is to break the cycle of poverty that passes from one generation to the other. To that end, the programme has five overarching goals that include creating equal opportunities for “*the poor*”, encouraging improvements in the quality of life of “*the poor*”, making equity its basic principle, strengthening the social fabric and promoting community development skills

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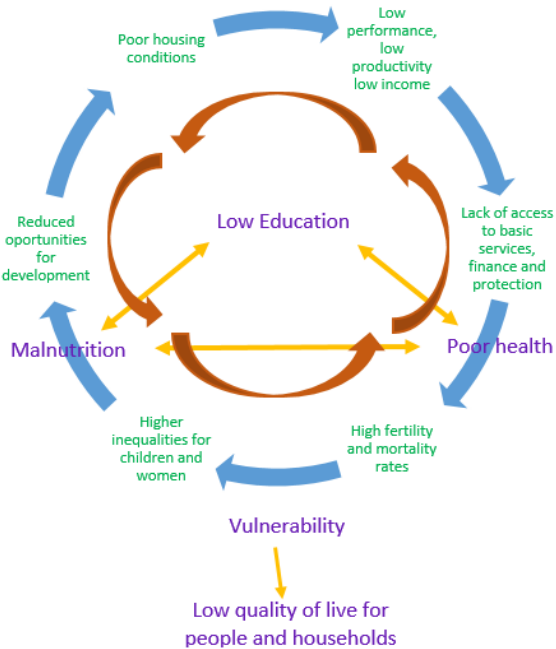
<sup>33</sup> The very few exceptions to this are single fathers or grandfathers and cases where the woman is not in a position to receive benefits for reasons of long-lasting health (mental or physical) problems.

<sup>34</sup> According to a relatively recent report from the IDB, women are the direct recipients of the bi-monthly stipend from *Prospera* in 95.8% of beneficiary households (IDB, 2013).

(Cohen *et al.*, 2006). According to Mexico’s Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL by its initials in Spanish), “*The social policy of the Mexican Government consists on improving human development and wellness of Mexicans, that’s why (Prospera) positions itself as one of its core political axes.*” (SEDESOL, 2010: 4).

The Ministry of Social Development understands poverty as cyclical and it refers to the phenomenon as the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Figure 3) by which it means that “*individuals with low income and precarious health and education pass on that same condition to the next generation. The intergenerational transmission indicates that fathers transfer to their children certain skills, cultural features and behaviours associated with a context of poverty, thus inhibit their social and economic mobility*” (SEDESOL, 2012: 5). This narrow approach to the intergenerational meaning and experience of poverty misses the accumulated disadvantages from one generation to another and as such, risks stigmatising and shaming welfare recipients as chapter five and six analyse.

**Figure 3:** Cycle of poverty according to *Prospera*  
*Vicious cycle of poverty*



Source: Programa Institucional 2003, CNPDHO, 2003, p.21

Figure 3 depicts the underlying understanding of poverty and concomitantly the actions required to fight it by *Prospera*. According to this, malnutrition, poor health and low levels of education are at the core of poverty. These largely explain and in turn reproduce poor performance at work, low income, poor living conditions, inequality, high levels of mortality and fertility, and ultimately reduced opportunities to have a fulfilling life.

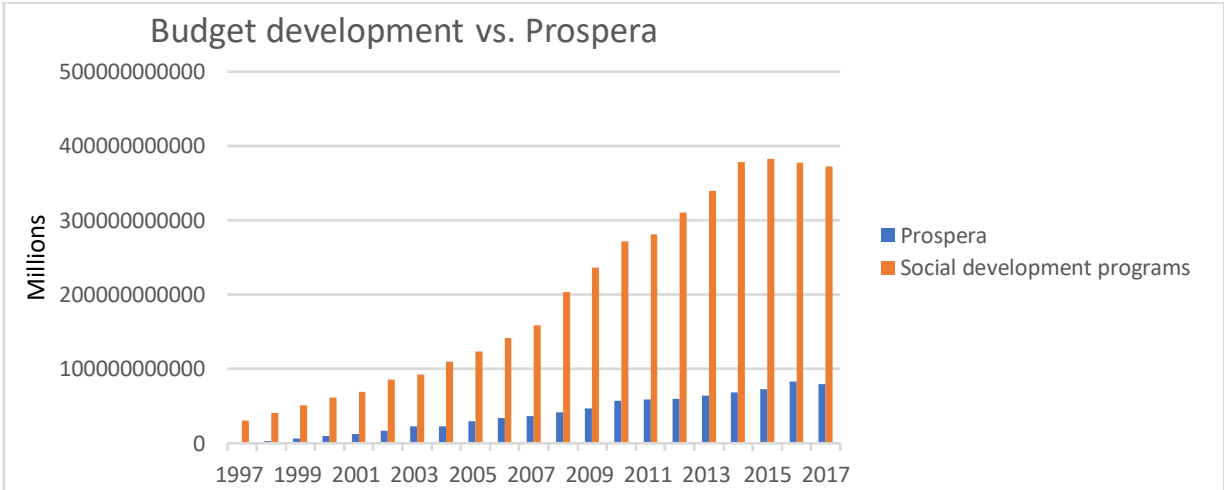
With *Prospera*, the “*extreme poor*” constitute the population social welfare is willing to support. In turn, this aligns with the economic viability and financial justification that a market-led economy requires. Thus, the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico is willing to support the entirety of the “*deserving poor*” on the premise that individuals requiring a minimum of human capital (education, health and nutrition) will eventually compete in the labour market (Damian, 2010). Thus, the right to government assistance comes from a “*deservingness*” rationale that rests on an idea of boosting the human capital of the “*extreme poor*” willing to commit themselves to society through the fulfilment of conditionalities, hard work in the labour market and effort in their lives.

Nevertheless, according to the most recent available data, during the years of *Prospera* income poverty increased from 6.2% of the population in 2012 to 7% in 2016 reaching by the end of that year a total of 8.6 million people. Furthermore, in the past years while the total number of people in extreme poverty reduced from 12.3 million people in 2008 to 9.4 million people in 2016, people in poverty increased from 44.4 million in 2008 to 53.4 million in 2016. That means that by the end of 2016, 7.6% of the population lived in extreme poverty and 43.6% of the population experienced poverty (CONEVAL, 2016).

Additionally, the relative budget allocation to *Prospera* vis-à-vis total expenditure on programmes to alleviate poverty underscores the growing interest by both policy makers and financial organisations. Accordingly, investment to *Prospera* has steadily increased, passing from 8% of the total budget allocated to development in

1998 to over 21% in 2017 (Table 5). Furthermore, the IDB provided £2.9 billion from 2002 to 2016 plus a recent loan payable in 36 months of \$600 million US dollars (around £458 million) to support Prospera (IDB, 2017). Similarly, the WB allocated a total of £2.1 billion from 2008 to 2014 alone, plus two lines of credit totalling \$650 million US dollars (around £496 millions),<sup>35</sup> exclusively for the smooth operation of *Prospera* (WB, 2017). Thus, these two financial institutions together have provided a sum of around £5.945 billion exclusively for *Prospera*.

**Table 5:** Budget allocation to social development programmes compared to budget allocation to *Prospera*, 1997-2017 (£)



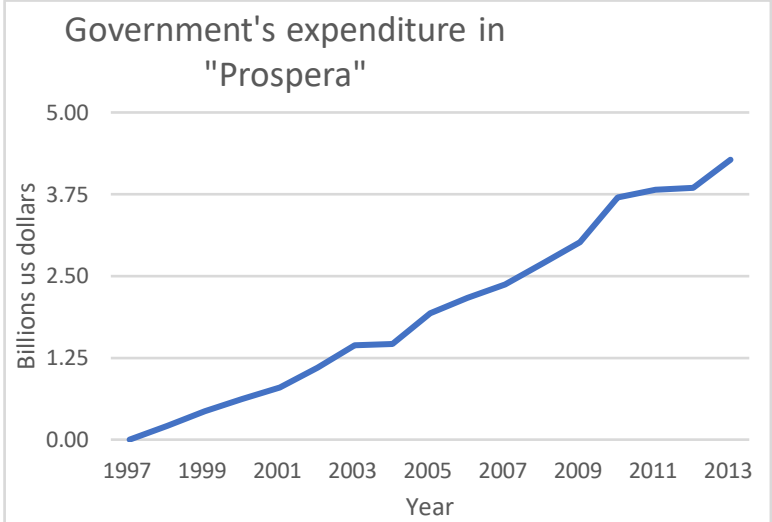
\*Units in this table are in Mexican Pesos – Average exchange rate £1 – \$25.5 Mexican pesos  
 Source: Based on information from (Presidencia, 2018)

Largely because of its political and international support, the size of the *Prospera* programme has steadily increased. While in its first year the government allocated around £11,000, in 2017 that figure reached £3.1 billion and an estimated total of £32.4 billion<sup>36</sup> from 1997 to 2017 (Table 6). For the government, these amounts of money signal the pivotal role of *Prospera* in the fight against poverty. Additionally,

<sup>35</sup> At an exchange rate of 1 sterling pound for 1.36 US Dollars.  
<sup>36</sup> At an exchange rate of 1 sterling pound for 25.5 Mexican pesos.

they reflect the growing trend of rolling out conditional money as a key strategy of social development.

**Table 6:** Expenditure on Prospera, 1997 – 2017 (US\$)



Source: Based on information from the Presidential Address to Society 2017

This is problematic because not only has poverty remained steady but also because inequality continues to increase (CONEVAL, 2015b), and as analysed in chapters five, six and seven the burden of conditionalities over people in the worst-off conditions extends beyond material hardships. The growing budget allocation to *Prospera* has gone hand in hand with some changes and modifications of its functioning. In turn, those changes represent a reinforcement on the one hand of *Prospera* and, on the other, of the neoliberal rationale working through social policy and social provision, as analysed throughout this thesis.

CCT programmes have been effective in reaching the majority of vulnerable communities, granting access to health services and increasing attendance at school as discussed in the following section. However, they have fallen far short of meeting basic needs of welfare recipients, particularly of people in the worst economic, political and social conditions, as analysed in the findings chapters.

To summarise, CCT programmes have gone through a number of changes over time including re-naming, functioning and incentives. Some authors have stated that this has been a result of several external evaluations (Behrman and Skoufias, 2006). Accordingly, the goal of these changes is to promote “*the linkage of beneficiaries with complementary social and productive programs, expand education services to youth through scholarships for vocational training and favour their access to formal employment through the National Employment Service. Additionally, it promotes financial inclusion through beneficiaries’ increased access to savings, microcredit and insurance.*” (WB, 2014: 2)

However, literature also suggests that changes of these types of programmes are not exempt from political influence (Hall, 2012). *Prospera* has been no exception to that, as evidenced by the three name changes of the Mexican CCT programme, which have coincided with the alternation in power between two different political parties. In relation to its predecessors, *Prospera* diversified the type of support, increased the monetary cash transfers and extended its scope (Table 7). It liaised with other public institutions to make alternative social programmes more easily accessible for beneficiaries, expanded health care coverage and made scholarships available for higher education.

**Table 7:** Changes over time in CCT programmes in Mexico, 1997-present

<b>Changes over time</b>	<b><i>Progresa</i></b>	<b><i>Oportunidades</i></b>	<b><i>Prospera</i></b>
Goal	An alternative to its predecessor, <i>Pronasol</i> .	Strengthening of <i>Progresa</i> with new actions: promotion of civil participation.	Strengthening of <i>Oportunidades</i> with new actions.
Development of human capital of the "poor" through conditioned cash transfers.	Increase the access to opportunities for development.	Ibid	
Identification of beneficiaries	Central identification of beneficiaries based on System of Regional Scores.	Central identification of beneficiaries based on Unique System of Scores.	Ibid
Unit of analysis	Unit of analysis: rural households	Unit of analysis: households in extreme	Ibid



	in extreme poverty.	poverty rural, semi-urban and urban.	
Coordination	Centralized coordination.	Centralized coordination; model of Attention to Care.	Ibid
Health and nutrition	Free basic health care including care for pregnant women, food supplements and a small fixed stipend.	Increases the emphasis on preventive health care. The quality of the nutrition supplement improves and is given to children aged between 4 months and 2 years, malnourished children from 2 to 4 years old and pregnant and lactating women.	Households have additional facilities to join the “ <i>Popular Insurance</i> ” or “ <i>Health Insurance Siglo XXI</i> ” The “ <i>Guaranteed Basic Package of Health</i> ” grew its size twice. Covers 27 basic medical services. Pregnant or nursing women, and children from 6 months to 5 years, will receive new food supplements. In 2016 the Nutrition program merged with <i>Prospera</i> . The component that corresponds to Nutrition Program is without conditions, while the functioning of <i>Prospera</i> remains the same.
Education	Bi-monthly cash transfers to children on primary and secondary education adjusted to age and gender. The focus is to improve educational attainment and reduce child labour.	Extends education grants to children in high school.	Young beneficiaries may benefit with scholarships for university or technical college. An extra incentive of 4,890 Mexican pesos to enrol in college.
Finances	N/A	Includes a saving plan for high school students. Bi-monthly cash transfer to senior citizens over 70 years old on households that are beneficiaries of <i>Prospera</i> .	Through the Development Bank, eases access for more than 6 million beneficiary women to financial services such as loans with average annual rates of 10%, life insurance, savings accounts, etc. Includes scholarships through the program “ <i>Becate</i> ”, for first year students of public Universities.
Labour force	N/A	N/A	Young beneficiaries will have priority on the National Employment Service when looking for a job, and on the program “ <i>Becate</i> ” that provides job training.
Productive live	N/A	N/A	Beneficiaries receive support to have a source of income that allows them to escape

poverty, through their own work and effort. Thus, beneficiary households will have priority access to 15 productive programs.

Despite the changes of name, extension of its target population, inclusion of new components, and the restructuring of its functioning, the programme remained fundamentally the same in its theoretical underpinnings, assumptions and goals. Hence, its approach to “*the poor*” has been that they inherit certain traits, attitudes and behaviours, and lack the necessary development of human capital to boost their personal finances and participate in the labour market. According to the designer of the programme, Santiago Levy, its goal is to “*create the right incentives today to stimulate the accumulation of human capital among poor families so that tomorrow, new generations can have the opportunity to generate higher income*” (Levy, 2006). *Prospera*’s underlying rationale that people are capable of escaping poverty by acquiring the necessary tools and developing particular personal traits has remained untouched.

In fact, the literature has barely analysed the theoretical assumptions behind CCT, criticised its approach to poverty alleviation or questioned the rationale behind conditioning money upon behavioural changes. Moreover, most of the literature around *Prospera* has focused on ill-equipped understandings of poverty based mainly on human capital formation, has developed a narrow approach to structural constraints and has been largely constrained by a policy oriented evaluation of social programmes. The purpose of the next section is to critically assess such literature.

### **2.3 The advocates of *Prospera*: advancing CCT’s agenda**

One of the most innovative elements of the *Prospera* programme since its implementation has been the planning of its own evaluation through external entities (Behrman *et al.*, 2012; Frenk, 2006; Levy, 2006; Neufeld *et al.*, 2011). To that end, the Ministry of Development (SEDESOL by its initials in Spanish) has requested several

evaluations based on the *Rules of Operation* of the programme and the *Expenditure Budget of the Federation*<sup>37</sup>. Accordingly, SEDESOL supervised the external evaluations of impact in line with the Guidelines for Evaluation of Federal Programmes<sup>38</sup>. The purpose of this has been to obtain comparable and measurable outputs for the expansion and adjustment of the programme (SEDESOL, 2014) as well as to issue reliable information tailored to improving the functioning of *Prospera*<sup>39</sup>. Most of the external examinations of *Prospera*, commissioned and often financed by the government, are constructed on surveys aimed at knowing the configuration of “*poor households*” in aspects such as living conditions, perceptions of services, health, education and expenditure (Appendix 6). Furthermore, their methodologically sound reports use different approaches (Appendix 7), which involve a wide variety of national and international research institutes that together with its international support has made CCT one of the most replicable policy tools, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Fiszbein, 2009), reproduced in over 52 countries worldwide (Prospera, 2014).

The robustness and internal and external validity of most of these external evaluations is a topic highlighted by many international organisations (Rawlings, 2005; World Bank, 2009, 2014a). This, coupled with the political use of *Prospera* and media dissemination of those reports, has generated certain power dynamics and the reproduction of a “*deservingness*” rationale, as chapter six analyses. Thus, this section investigates the role of external evaluations in the expansion of *Prospera* and its

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<sup>37</sup> The Federal Government of Mexico issues annual guidelines for the exercise, control and evaluation of public expenditure. Furthermore, every year the Ministry of Social Development issues the rules of operation of every social development programme including *Prospera*, that includes entities involved, amendments or clarifications of their functioning,

<sup>38</sup> The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, by its initials in Spanish) governs these guidelines. Accordingly, CONEVAL is a “*decentralised public body of the Federal Public Administration, with autonomy and technical capacity to generate objective information on the situation of social policy and the measurement of poverty in Mexico, which allows for better decision-making in the matter.*” (CONEVAL, 2018: 1).

<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding, through its component of external evaluations the programme secures for itself a bastion of methodologically sound reports that reassert its relevance and pertinence. This is the case because SEDESOL supervises and coordinates all external evaluations and CONEVAL sets the basis and characteristics of every evaluation of Federal Programmes such as *Prospera*, as chapter five investigates.

growing legitimacy and authority. To that end, it researches the importance of the different approaches, methodologies and expertise around evaluations of *Prospera* in advancing CCTs worldwide and Mexico in particular, while also discussing key findings of 154 internal and external evaluations, 30 journal articles, and 3 books, and concomitant policy recommendations. Furthermore, it analyses the implications of the wide variety of human capital measures for the approach to poverty alleviation. It then discusses the limitations of those approaches in understanding a life in poverty and ultimately in alleviating it and positions this doctoral thesis in the realm of critical approaches to *Prospera*.

### *2.3.1. Health and Nutrition*

In relation to the health and nutrition components of *Prospera*, the literature has emphasised its positive effects while also pointing to some of its setbacks or limitations. However, in all cases the advice has been either to strengthen the food supplies or improve the quality of workshops and talks without any critical appraisal of the role of these components in reducing the control beneficiaries have over their resources for the satisfaction of needs.

For instance, the literature looks at quality of health care service provision and the impact of *Prospera* on health-related practices of beneficiaries. Accordingly, some authors used multilevel *probit* models to analyse assistance to the clinics and *logit* models to understand the quality of delivery. Their findings report that localities with longer exposure to the programme had 2.1% more clinic visits from women. (Sosa-Rubi, et al., 2011). Similarly, research found that women of indigenous origin were 68.9% less likely to visit a general practitioner for childbirth than women of non-indigenous background (Sosa-Rubi, et al., 2011). Furthermore, using a longitudinal methodology other authors asserted that young women between 15 and 19 years old had 88% more probability of choosing a physician instead of a traditional midwife for

childbirth<sup>40</sup>. This number decreased to 41% for young women aged between 20 and 24 years old (Sosa-Rubi et al., 2011), which arguably suggests that the earlier the intervention from *Prospera* the higher its positive impact. Furthermore, exposure to *Prospera*, other authors stated, steadily increased use of contraceptive methods from 13% in 1992 to 19% in 2009 (Darney, et al., 2013).

The literature also analyses the impact of CCT on improving health and nutrition. Accordingly, research focused on the positive impact of cash transfer on socio-emotional problems such as cognition, vocabulary and behavioural problems for children between 8 and 10 years old by measuring socio-economic status based on an *ad-hoc* asset index (Fernald et al., 2009; Ozer et al., 2009). In relation to adults and the elderly, the literature used linear regressions and matching estimators to report the long-run impact of the programme on the significant improvement of aging people's health, particularly women (Behrman, 2012).

Furthermore, some authors illustrated the decline of malnutrition during the past 10 years in children of two years old due to exposure to *Prospera* (Farfan et al., 2012). Additionally, others referred to the decline of malnutrition in children aged 24 months in the past 10 years also due to the exposure to the programme (Neufeld et al., 2008). Similarly, using control groups, research found a reduction of anaemia in rural areas because of exposure to *Prospera* (Rivera, 2004). Additionally, other research that focused on socio-economic contexts and *Prospera's* impact in urban and rural areas with an emphasis on indigenous communities showed that anaemia reduced in rural areas (Rivera, 2004) as a result of exposure to CCT. Furthermore, others argued that *Prospera* was associated with increase in height (Behrman and Hoddinott, 2005; Farfán et al. 2012) and reduction of anaemia (Gertler, 2004; Rivera, 2009).

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<sup>40</sup> The government constantly undertakes campaigns to prevent women giving birth at home with midwives as an attempt to reduce infant mortality. However, there are reports of these efforts clashing with traditions of indigenous communities wherein midwives have a paramount role in their society, which risks shaming and punishing them for their own traditions. Furthermore, international evidence shows that countries with lower rates of maternal mortality are those with professional midwifery (CONACYT, 2008).

However, these contested results<sup>41</sup> assume causation between conditionalities and people accessing health care, disregarding increased budget allocation to public health (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, while the health and nutrition of small children has improved, this has been the case mainly due to the improved nutrition supplement as opposed to the increased conditionalities from *Prospera*. Similarly, while rates of anaemia might have decreased, obesity is in the rise (OECD, 2017).

In fact, the literature, using a nine-year cohort study, shows that children below the age of five had a malnutrition prevalence of 40.1%, wherein 69.9% of the cohort have not recovered from malnourishment, despite exposure to *Prospera* for nine years (Garcia-Parra et al., 2016). Similarly, research that used randomised controlled trials shows that despite some positive effects of the programme, after 10 years of its implementation, anaemia remained high among mothers in rural areas (Ramirez-Silva et al., 2013).

Furthermore, research also shows that obesity among beneficiary women remains as high as the national average (Barquera et al., 2009) in both urban and rural areas (Fernald et al., 2004). In some cases, obesity is even higher for beneficiaries in urban areas than the national average (Rosas et al., 2011). Additionally, some studies have found that the health-related education component of the programme was rather weak (Bonvecchio et al., 2009), thus questioning the validity of results that directly attribute the health improvement of its beneficiaries to *Prospera's* training.

These approaches have little to no consideration of structural factors such as infrastructure, access to clean water and sanitation, quality of education and health services, and access to public transportation, among others. Such limitation prevents them from explaining the increasing vulnerability of the most marginalised groups of society (Lister, 2004). Furthermore, they are at odds with other research that

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<sup>41</sup> Longitudinal studies have shown that *Prospera* has a differing effect on health when adjusting for age that questions the effectiveness of *Prospera* improving health across all age ranges (Barquera et al., 2009; Fernald et al., 2004; Fernald and Hidrobo, 2011; Ramirez-Silva et al., 2013).

demonstrates how the *Prospera* programme has a very limited effect (Villarespe, 2010) and in some cases a negative effect on the most vulnerable groups (Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012). While this doctoral thesis does not analyse indigenous communities where *Prospera* operates, the analysis of the data shows that in remote areas, people in worse off economic conditions, and women with less material and symbolic power, are particularly vulnerable to a welfare system that rests on punishing deviant households through shame, opprobrium and withdrawal of benefits. This suggests that indigenous communities would struggle the most to engage with *Prospera* (Hevia, 2016).

Nevertheless, policy recommendations on health and nutrition related aspects are narrow and policy specific. For instance, they suggest the inclusion of complementary feeding practices and promotion of healthier eating habits to ameliorate nutrition (Lisa et al., 2011; Barquera et al., 2009), replacing or modifying the dietary supplements provided in rural areas (García-Guerra et al., 2009; Leroy et al., 2008) and including awareness campaigns to increase complementary feeding practices (WHO, 2017).

As previously mentioned, several of these policy recommendations have already been included in the performance and evaluation of the programme, a situation that governments and international donors often praise as a key accomplishment of CCTs and *Prospera* in particular (WB, 2014; 2015; Presidencia, 2017). An example of these changes is the creation of the Integrated Strategy for Attention to Nutrition (EsiAN, by its initials in Spanish) developed by a national panel of experts in health and nutrition (Neufeld et al., 2011).<sup>42</sup>

However, the lived experiences of research interviewees show that conditional money contradicts the health of households in expansion stage, single mothers and households with an elderly person or a person with a disability at home, as chapters

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, EsiAN is currently the national health and nutrition strategy of the *Prospera* programme and it focuses particularly on the health of children during the first 1,000 days after birth (Bonvecchio et al., 2015).

four and five analyse. Furthermore, their life trajectories emphasise the very limited consideration of *Prospera* regarding people's needs and satisfaction thereof.

### 2.3.2. Education

The literature regarding the education component has focused mainly on the impact of *Prospera* on school attainment, enrolment ratio and changes of behaviour, with a particular emphasis on women. Policy advice has been to extend scholarships to higher education (Parker, 2005), reduce cash transfers to beneficiaries with lower grades at school and improve monitoring of results in all grades (Behrman et al., 2012). However, it overemphasises the impact of conditional money on school attainment, downplays the reproduction of gender roles of *Prospera* and ultimately reproduces the idea of making people responsible for individual achievements with little to no regard for structural constraints.

For instance, several reports and academic papers have focused on the role of *Prospera* in improving education (Behrman et al., 2011; Behrman and Skoufias, 2006; Darney et al., 2013). Accordingly, the literature used cross-sectional data through non-experimental methods to examine the increase in attainment for women and men due to exposure to *Prospera* (Parker, 2005). Others reported a statistically significant reduction of support needed from parents to children to do their homework and an increase in time spent by children doing their homework (Behrman et al., 2012) with similar impact estimates in both urban and rural areas where *Prospera* operated.

Furthermore, the literature has focused on the impact of *Prospera* on behavioural and social abilities of children (Neufeld et al., 2008). For instance, by using stochastic methods to analyse results beyond the mean some authors have characterised the programme as a fundamental element in the development of children's non-cognitive abilities (Figueroa, 2014). Similarly, a number of other authors have reported the positive effect of *Prospera* on behavioural development (Gertler 2004) and the reduction in aggressive symptoms in children (Ozer et al., 2009).



Another part of the literature has focused on the role of *Prospera* in enrolment and attainment levels. Some authors using multivariate regressions concluded that the programme has a positive effect on primary and junior high school enrolment ratio and performance (Behrman and Skoufias, 2006). Through comparative analysis of beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, other authors have looked at the impact of the programme on school enrolment ratio and working behaviours of teenagers (Behrman et al., 2012) arguing for the positive effects of *Prospera* in both. Other research that analysed the impact of additional scholarships for high school students indicated an increase of 85% in high school enrolment ratio for rural areas and 10% for urban areas (Parker, 2005).

The literature also discussed the link between *Prospera*, educational level of mothers and enrolment ratio at school. Some authors indicated that the programme had a bigger impact on children of mothers with lower educational attainment. According to this, the lower the education of the mother the greater the school enrolment ratio. As a result of a direct influence of *Prospera*, in schools where mothers had an average of three years of education the school enrolment ratio was 75% higher than schools where mothers' average level of education was 9 years or more, because of *Prospera* (Hernandez and Hernandez, 2003).

A rich corpus of research on *Prospera* underscored its positive impacts on the education of women. Accordingly, some authors have reported better progression rates for girls than for boys throughout primary school (Behrman et al., 2005) because of exposure to *Prospera*. Furthermore, others have appraised that after two years of programme enrolment there was an increase of secondary education level results of around 11% for girls compared to 7.5% for boys (Schultz, 2004). Similarly, others have illustrated a 24% increase in junior high school enrolment after 5 years of exposure to the programme (Parker, 2005) indicating that the increase in percentage was higher for girls (28.7%) than for boys (15.7%) (Azevedo and Robles, 2014). Also in relation to education, other authors focused on girls' attainment at secondary level and reported

an increase from 28% to 46% over a period of 18 years from 1992 to 2009 (Darney et al., 2013).

A number of other studies looked at the differentiated effect of the programme on indigenous and non-indigenous communities in relation to education. By using disaggregated data, the literature has asserted that the programme positively impacts the continuation of children and young people's educational trajectories, arguing that indigenous individuals benefit more than non-indigenous ones. Accordingly, they concluded that young indigenous women who were or are currently beneficiaries of the programme have the highest rates of school attendance and completion of higher-level education. (de la Rocha, 2008a). However, by using cross data analysis from official national and international sources to assess the impact of CCT research elsewhere shows that the theory of change behind it pushes indigenous communities further away from society (Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012).

Part of the literature that positively appraises *Prospera* has restated that its impact is greater on women than men in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Thus, it characterises indigenous women as the most benefited group among the whole society (Agudo and Jimenez, 2008). Furthermore, some authors have reported a reduction of both the gender and the ethnicity gap (de la Rocha, 2008b). However, more recent studies demonstrate that the CCT programme in Mexico has had a very limited effect (Villarespe, 2010) and in some cases a negative effect on the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to education and educational attainment (Ulrichs and Roelen, 2012).

Moreover, the conceptualisation of women by this corpus of research is limited to a traditional conception of women's role in society. Accordingly, research demonstrates that *Prospera* intensifies gender roles. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with women in rural communities, authors show the reinforcement of motherhood as the main social role of women, who can in turn lose all kind of benefits from the state and be socially ostracised if behaving otherwise (Smith-

Oka, 2009). Additionally, other authors have used a historical review of social policy provision in Latin America, analysing CCT in Mexico as a case study, to illustrate the perpetuation of patriarchy through the continuation of social division (Molyneux, 2006).

While this literature has proven paramount to show the reproduction of traditional values that promote the submissive role of women by *Prospera*, the reproduction of power abuses in local communities and CCT's incapacity to secure social rights, it has fallen short of investigating the relation between the underlying assumptions of CCT in reproducing poverty and inequality. In particular, there is an astonishing lack of research linking the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism with the lived experience of poverty by welfare recipients, which this thesis advances. Accordingly, there is a lack of research on how human capital theory not only inhibits the possibilities of the most disadvantaged people in society to escape poverty (Ulrichs and Roelen, 2012), but has actually served to perpetuate it.

The findings of this thesis strike a chord with research on women beneficiaries from the CCT programme in Mexico that show the process through which it reproduces a set of values and norms imposed on society. These norms disregard the heterogeneity of social groups that configure Mexican society, thus reproducing gender exploitation (Molyneux, 2006) and intensifying gender roles (Smith-Oka, 2009). Thus, this thesis advances this research by examining the interaction between material hardships and the relational/symbolic experience of poverty from the vantage point of women welfare recipients through their lived experience and interaction with the social protection system in Mexico.

Policy recommendations emerging from the literature around the education component of *Prospera* are rather problematic. For instance, they have advised increasing the number of beneficiaries (Debowicz and Golan, 2014) by reducing the amount of money allotted to children in lower grades (primary) and using that budget for those in junior high school (Azevedo and Robles, 2010), reducing the size of the

beneficiary population who are not properly using the components of the programme (Leroy et al., 2008) These policy recommendations call for a stringent approach to social provision which could endanger the lives of people who can barely make ends meet.

The rather limited human capital indices for measuring education and ultimately social development disguise the harm of a social programme that rests on conditioning money upon certain behaviours. In all the cases above, the authors also assume causation between access to education and conditional money from *Prospera* with an emphasis on its trade-off effects and change in beneficiaries' behaviour. Notwithstanding, through multivariate regressions research has shown the marginal effect of cash transfers on mothers' expenditure behaviours related to human capital formation (Handa et al., 2009), and a limited increase in the decision-making authority of women (Das, 2005). This dampens the enthusiasm related to the often-assumed empowerment of women through CCT. Furthermore, research has also shown that parents send their children to school provided there is an increase in their income and household's wealth (Hedges et al., 2016), which suggests conditionalities have little to do with people's investment in children's education. In fact, the analysis in this thesis underscores the importance that education has for research participants particularly in relation to the future living conditions of their children, which comes from their personal trajectories as opposed to training from *Prospera*, as analysed in chapter five.

The lived experience of beneficiary women emphasises the burden that caring and household responsibilities impose on women and the extent to which these are reproduced by *Prospera*, as chapter five analyses. Furthermore, the burdens of poverty coupled with the conditions imposed by *Prospera* reduce the control that women have - particularly in rural areas - over access to formal jobs and satisfaction of needs, as the findings chapters analyse.

### 2.3.3. Infrastructure, access to assets and service provision

The literature that analysed the impact of *Prospera* on people's access to resources has focused mainly on infrastructure, income, investment, distributional effects in the local economy, and quality of and access to health care services and education. Policy advice has been to increase budget allocations to *Prospera*, strengthen CCT, improve service provision by the government, further embed *Prospera* in the provision of welfare programmes and enhance its links with other social programmes. However, they have reproduced a discourse of “*deservingness*” that pushes people further away from control over their living conditions.

The literature that measured the positive impact of *Prospera* in terms of access to resources was wide and varied considerably in its methodological approaches. For instance, through random samples of official data regarding socioeconomic characteristics of households in Mexico, some authors have asserted that the programme positively alters the long-term income of households by improving rational decisions around asset-investment behaviours, thus creating multiplying effects for the economy. (Behrman, et al., 2012).

Similarly, others have applied a microsimulation exercise and calculated the distributional impact of contra-factual programme designs (Freije et al., 2007) asserting that *Prospera* improves efficiency gains (de Janvry et al., 2006) and that it is more effective in reducing poverty than other cash transfer programmes (Skoufias and McClafferty, 2001). Likewise, other authors have illustrated how the programme positively affects the long-term resources of households who invest in productive activities and assets, thus reducing short-term poverty and improving the local economy (Winters and Chiodi, 2011). Accordingly, some have concluded that *Prospera* has reduced the depth of poverty, better known as the poverty gap, by 10% (Behrman and Skoufias, 2006).

However, these results contradict national and local trends of stagnant poverty (CONEVAL, 2018) and increasing inequality (Colmex, 2018; Reyes et al., 2017) in the

past twenty years. Furthermore, these approaches measure poverty largely in terms of income. Thus, they justify government intervention exclusively when a household's income is below a certain threshold (i.e. extreme poverty). This is problematic because with these narrow understandings of poverty, measurements replace its analysis (Villarespe, 2010), and in turn the evaluation of *Prospera* replaces the analysis of the theoretical underpinnings that have paved the way for CCT programmes to arise. Furthermore, there is limited consideration of social dynamics, households' configuration and local power dynamics in these analyses, which prevents them from analysing the tensions created by *Prospera* vis-à-vis beneficiaries' income and other material and immaterial resources, as chapter five and six analyse.

Within this body of literature a criticism worth emphasising refers to the services provided by the government to explain the limited effects of *Prospera*. Accordingly, authors have focused on the low quality of health and education service provision (Esquivel, 2012), access to health or education institutions by people in extremely poor households (Martinez et al., 2012), low qualification and low salaries in rural areas (Rodríguez, 2012) and inconsistent policy to overcome poverty (Sanchez, 2008). In all cases, it is not the assumptions or functioning of CCT but external factors that negatively influence the access to and distribution of resources by welfare recipients.

The literature has analysed the differing experiences of *Prospera* from urban and rural areas (COLMEX, 2018), and from a variety of approaches that range across anthropological fieldwork (COLMEX, 2018), panel studies and extensive interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries and service providers (Martínez, 2012; Yaschine, 2009; de la Rocha, 2008a). The evaluations that mentioned the marginal impact of the programme on access to resources by welfare recipients, attributed it to insufficient infrastructure for education (Mancera et al., 2012) and an underresourced health care system (Sánchez, 2008). Similarly, some others attributed the marginal impact of *Prospera* to a weak local economy (Ortega and Pasillas, 2008), internal configuration of households (de la Rocha, 2004), systematic burdens placed on women (Sánchez, 2008),

and differences between urban and rural (Enríquez, 2006) and indigenous and non indigenous communities (de la Rocha et al., 2004).

Thus, their suggestions were to strengthen the programme, widen its scope and make a more efficient use of resources (both human and capital). The literature also called for a refined version of CCT (Skoufias et al., 2001). In particular, they suggested broadening CCT to other aspects such as financial assets, increasing links with other programmes in higher education (SEDESOL, 2014) the labour market and infrastructure (de la Rocha, 2008a; Sanchez, 2008) and diversifying the programme's connection with other social programmes (Vinay, 2005).

Similarly, another important strand of the literature that externalised the failure of *Prospera* to alleviate poverty referred to the already limited development of households' human capital. Accordingly, it mentions the internal configuration of households (Enriquez, 2006; Valdez, 2006) and the deterioration of communitarian links (Soto et al., 2008) to explain how an economic environment limits beneficiaries' access to the labour market (Gutiérrez, 2013; de la Rocha, 2008b). Similarly, the literature also pointed to the geographical, cultural and ethnic barriers (Sanchez, 2008; Corcuera et al., 2008; de la Rocha, 2008), coping capabilities underdeveloped by household members and educational background of parents (Agudo and Jimenez, 2008; de la Rocha, 2003) to explain the marginal effects of *Prospera*.

Furthermore, a large strand of the external evaluations focused on the programme's operation. This includes reports that have suggested reconsidering the education component regarding scholarships for first and second years of primary school (Rodríguez, 2014), matching the programme with other food and cash transfer programmes (Rodriguez, 2012) and transitioning it into a model of a permanent social protection scheme (Levy, 2006). Arguably, this would in turn increase the scope and impact of *Prospera* for people's access to resources. Therefore, the advice was in all cases to strengthen CCT, enhance its embeddedness with other social programmes and ultimately to make sure *Prospera* continues as a key form of social policy (Levy, 2008).

An important element to highlight in relation to the study of infrastructure in the evaluations of *Prospera*, is that during the CCT programme's first years of operation, there was little to no analysis of the structural factors of poverty. In fact, the first all-encompassing evaluation that directly referred to the constraints of structural forces as crucial to understanding the impact of CCT was the external evaluation after ten years of intervention (Bertozzi and de la Rocha, 2008) and the analysis of the programme through a gendered approach (Lopez et al., 2006). Thenceforth, evaluations paid more attention to context.

That is not to say that previous evaluations did not refer to structural factors. In fact, surveys such as ENCELURB and ENCASEH<sup>43</sup> took into account the quality and availability of services in a household, and the quality of education and health services. Instead, what it means is that after those assessments, there was an important change in the way evaluators analysed the *Prospera* programme. Structural constraints stopped being mere factors that accompanied people in poverty, and became important elements in the "equation" of poverty.

A clear example of this is the "*Diagnosis of the social problems addressed by the program Oportunidades 2011*" which explicitly addressed the causes of poverty from three interrelated structural dynamics. The first referred to behaviour in economic growth and development (Esquivel, 2012). According to this, an individual's attitudes and behaviours directly affect the performance of an economy that underscores the logic of investing in human capital, particularly of "*the poor*". The second referred to the structure and dynamics of labour markets. Thence, individual's access to jobs are constrained by the dynamics at play between the formal and informal economy, which also strengthens the logic of focusing policy on enhancing human capital to arguably balance the harms of the market and nurture people's capacity to escape poverty. The third referred to the effect of institutions, culture and social capital. Hence, "*the poor*" interact in a complex environment of social relations wherein cultural dynamics,

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<sup>43</sup> Survey Evaluation of Rural Households (ENCELURB, by its initials in Spanish) and Survey of Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households (ENCASEH).



institutional forces and access to social capital largely constrain their achievements. Thus, the suggestion was to nurture healthier behaviours, foster dynamics of social cohesion and ease service provision by government institutions. *Prospera* is arguably in a privileged position to target these elements by tweaking its functioning and improving efficiency and the quality of its workshops.

This acquires more importance in the light of the WB's World Development Report 2015 (WB, 2015). The 2015 WDR presented an enhanced approach to human choice and action drawing from a myriad of disciplines such as neuroscience, behavioural economics and anthropology. It constructed a three-axis theory of human behaviour: thinking automatically, thinking socially and thinking with mental models. It was a strengthened account of the standard economic understanding of self-motivated and fully rational individuals. In this report, the processes of mind, history and context were instrumental in targeting human behaviour (WB, 2015: 72). In the words of Kaushik Basu, chief economist of the World Bank "*Standard economic policies are effective only after the right cognitive propensities and social norms are in place(...)*" (WB, 2014b).

The rising influence of this trend of behavioural economics advocated by the WB became clear in the 2006 external evaluations of the *Prospera* programme, produced by CIESAS. The authors clearly stated that programmes such as *Prospera* do not fail, nor succeed. Rather it is "*wider social networks, socio-economic circumstances, domestic scenarios (...) that may or may not validate development actions and the behaviours induced by the latter in the beneficiaries what makes them fail or succeed*" (de la Rocha et al., 2006: 449).

According to these analyses, with programmes like *Prospera* their existence and maintenance is unquestionable; the problem is merely a matter of adjusting their functioning to context. Thus, it is the choices and behaviour of beneficiaries at different levels (household, community, and institutions), their interactions with other

beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and the quality of services they have access to that determines the impact of the program and ultimately its efficacy.

Therefore, beneficiaries are responsible for their personal development, the impact of the program and more importantly, their own success or failure in escaping poverty. The underlying assumption is that the government, by rolling out CCT, fights poverty in the correct way. Furthermore, the implications of externalising the failures of *Prospera* are that this shields it from criticism and pushes a once-size-fits-all approach to poverty alleviation that is at odds with people's lived experience of poverty, as chapters five, six and seven analyse.

The emphasis on how external evaluations confirm the programme's results and its validity through yearly government reports (Presidencia, 2005; Presidencia, 2012; SEDESOL, 2014; SEDESOL, 2015) attest to the remarkable political and media use of its "*infallibility*". The fact that external evaluations refer to *Prospera* as an infallible programme reproduces and perpetuates the authority of *Prospera* vis-à-vis welfare recipients that increases power asymmetries between government officials and beneficiaries and among beneficiaries, which chapter seven investigates.

International donors such as the WB and the IDB have had an important role to play in this. For example, every year the WB issues the "*Support to Oportunidades Project Implementation Status Results Report*" (WB, 2014; 2013; 2012 and 2011) and the "*Implementation, Completion and Results Report*" (WB, 2016; 2017), which highlight the results and efficiency of the programme and make some recommendations. Not surprisingly, the kind of suggestions made span from increasing the budget allocated to the programme and improving its efficiency by, for instance, the elimination of the duplication of tasks, and raising the quality of services provided.

As previously mentioned, for these external evaluations the failure of *Prospera* or rather, when it fails to boost the human capital of its beneficiaries, is attributable to external factors, which paves the way to dismiss *a priori* any criticism regarding the

validity of the programme. Accordingly, the literature refers to a wide range of externalities such as reduced human capital formation expressed on limited school achievements (Mancera et al., 2012, Sánchez, 2009), health related behaviours such as reduction of preventive health clinic visits (Angeles, 2011), and eating behaviours (Ramirez-Silva et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these narrow understandings of poverty miss the complexities of negotiating scarce resources, caring responsibilities and the growing demands from *Prospera* that push beneficiaries' time further away from their control and ultimately reduce their control over socially available resources, as chapter five analyses.

The core difference between this part of the literature and the others is that it assesses government performance through its service provision and ultimately its incoherent antipoverty policy (Table 8). Notwithstanding, while this strand of the literature has called to improve the quality of services provided to people in poverty by the government, it has left untouched the underlying rationale of punishing people according to behaviour, a rationale that rests on an ill-equipped definition of agency drawing from a neoliberal subject (Chandler, 2016), which chapter six investigates.

**Table 8:** Summary of mainstream findings, policy advice and gaps in the literature

Themes	Key findings mainstream research	Policy advice	Literature gaps/limitations
Health and nutrition	<p>Achievements of <i>Prospera</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased women's visits to health clinics.</li> <li>• Increased young women's selection of GP over traditional midwife.</li> <li>• Increased use of contraceptive methods.</li> <li>• Reduced vocabulary and cognition problems in children.</li> <li>• Improved health of the elderly, particularly women.</li> <li>• Reduced malnutrition of children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of complementary feeding practices.</li> <li>• Promote healthier eating habits.</li> <li>• Modify dietary supplements particularly in rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes causation between conditional money and people accessing health, disregarding investment to health care sector.</li> <li>• Assumes causation between reduction of anaemia and cash transfer, disregarding quality of non-conditional nutritional supplement.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced anaemia of children.</li> <li>• Increased height of children.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little to no consideration of structural factors.</li> <li>• Longitudinal research shows that after 10 years of exposure nutritional problems (anaemia and obesity) in women remains high.</li> </ul>
Education	<p>Achievements of <i>Prospera</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased grades of schooling for both men and women.</li> <li>• Reduced support needed by children from parents to do their homework.</li> <li>• Increased time spent by children doing their homework.</li> <li>• Developed children's non-cognitive abilities.</li> <li>• Reduced children's aggressive symptoms.</li> <li>• Increased school enrolment ration of primary and secondary school.</li> <li>• Improved education results of women compared to men.</li> <li>• Reduced gender and ethnicity gap.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of beneficiaries by reducing money to children in lower grades.</li> <li>• Penalise population not using benefits correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes causation between access and results of education to conditional money.</li> <li>• A traditional conception of women's role in society.</li> <li>• Reinforces motherhood as main role of women.</li> <li>• Perpetuates patriarchy.</li> </ul>
Infrastructure, access to assets and service provision	<p>Achievements of <i>Prospera</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved long-run income of households.</li> <li>• Improved efficiency gains.</li> <li>• Improved long-term resources.</li> <li>• Reduced depth of poverty.</li> </ul> <p>Explanations for limited effects of <i>Prospera</i>/externalisation of failure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced human capital of households.</li> <li>• Limited resources of welfare recipients.</li> <li>• Deterioration of communitarian links.</li> <li>• Insufficient infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen <i>Prospera</i>.</li> <li>• Widen its scope.</li> <li>• Include financial support.</li> <li>• Expand scholarships.</li> <li>• Diversify its connection with other social programmes.</li> <li>• Homologate it with other food and cash transfer programmes.</li> <li>• Evolve into a permanent social protection scheme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contradicts national and international reports of stagnant poverty and increasing inequality.</li> <li>• Narrow understanding of poverty – income based.</li> <li>• Reproduces “deservingness” discourse.</li> <li>• Lacks consideration of household's internal configuration.</li> <li>• Disregards local power dynamics.</li> </ul>

- Weak local economy.
- Internal configuration of households.
- Social burden on women.
- Differences urban-rural / indigenous/ non-indigenous areas.
- Overlooks tensions posed by *Prospera* in relation to people's needs.

Notwithstanding, a growing body of literature contests the findings of external and internal reports of CCT through a variety of lenses such as gender (Molyneux, 2016), political economy of development (Smith-Oka, 2009) and anthropology (Hevia, 2009). Accordingly, the “*deservingness*” discourse that attributes the burdens of poverty to “*the poor*”, “*runs the risk of perpetuating and reinforcing the groups’ marginalised and disadvantaged positions*” (Ulrichs and Roelen, 2012: 17). While this literature has proven paramount to show the reproduction of traditional values that promote the submissive role of women by *Prospera*, the reproduction of power abuses in local communities and the incapacity of CCT to secure social rights, it has fallen short of investigating the relationship between the underlying assumptions of CCT with the reproduction of poverty and inequality. In particular, there is an astonishing lack of research linking the dynamics of capitalist neoliberalism with the lived experience of poverty by welfare recipients, which this thesis advances.

To summarise, internal and external evaluations have reproduced the government’s rhetoric regarding the unquestionable “*raison d’etre*” of CCT programmes and ultimately their continuation and expansion. This is the case even with appraisals that suggest reformulating the middle and long-term strategic plans of the programme (Levy, 2006), restructuring or eliminating certain components of the programme (Rodríguez, 2012) or including the programme in a wider national development strategy (Lopez and Salles, 2006). Furthermore, these assessments of the programme also conclude that it fulfils a very important function in the development of the country, that it is the right strategy and as such, requires expansion. However, the reproduction of such discourse advances a conceptual separation between deserving and undeserving “*poor*” that ignores the voices of people most struggling to survive, as

chapters five, six and seven further investigate. All in all, the policy advice has been to secure more funding to *Prospera*, strengthen its links with other social programmes, and improve the quality of services provided by the government.

The life trajectories of all research interviewees confirm that the embeddedness of *Prospera* with local dynamics and its constant surveillance over people's behaviours further add to the inequalities of the urban-rural divide, as chapter five, six and seven analyse. Interestingly, the underlying logic of a social policy focused on boosting human capital to ease people's entry into the labour market via the education ladder finds its roots in neo-classical economics and is in fact part of a neoliberal agenda that aims to influence the mindset of individuals, to make them think in terms of the market rationale.

## **2.4. Neoliberalism**

The cost of structural adjustment programmes, the political discontent against the interventionist approach of the State particularly during the 1970s and the rise of the *tecnocratas*, together with the growing influence from international donors such as the IMF and the WB and economic shifts in the region, paved the way for the entry of neoliberalism. The change in the nature of welfare provision during the fourth wave of social policy - namely CCT - directly relates to processes of embedding neoliberalism in the 1980s, and the democratic reforms of the 1990s.

In recent decades, the ultimate goal of developing countries has been effective and efficient integration in the global market (Krugman, 2009); that is to say, competitiveness, attraction of foreign direct investment, and developing the economy and domestic markets (Villarespe, 2010). This normative vision has defined the goals of social policy, which in the case of Mexico, as previously discussed, manifests through several processes (waves) of social policy provision, the most recent of which has constructed an economic rationale that promotes human capital formation as the cornerstone for development. This section starts by tracing the evolution of

neoliberalism and its links between economic thought and international financial institutions. It then relates this to its embeddedness in Mexico and in particular in the fourth wave of social policy. To that end, it understands neoliberalism as a paradigm that reproduces the dynamics of capital accumulation, but also one that builds on an ethos of ethics based on individualism and competition in the market. While neoliberalism is a particular moment of capitalism (capital neoliberalism),<sup>44</sup> it is at the same time a paradigm that signals certain market dynamics in its interaction with the state and society as analysed in what follows.

#### *2.4.1. The rise of neoliberalism*

The roots of neoliberal thought date back to the late 19th century. The University of Chicago, founded in 1892 by John D. Rockefeller, adhered to the neoclassical theory of economy and free market. Frank Knight, arguably the founding father of liberal thought, considered that the cost of any economic decision was the utility of the sacrificed alternatives available (Ekelund and Hébert, 1992). It was then that the economic approach to time started gaining relevance. Accordingly, the time allocated to the development of human capital was critical for increasing efficiency. This functionalist understanding of time later influenced the design of social policy and its behaviourist approach to human capital formation, as analysed in chapter two.

However, it wasn't until the late 1950s that Nobel Laureates Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker coined the concept of human capital (Schultz, 1960a; 1960b; Villarespe, 2010). Their perspective was that the investment in human capital was linked to economic growth, the reduction of unemployment and ultimately the reduction of poverty. Thus, their policy recommendation was for governments to invest in health and education to promote a sound economy. In Theodore Schultz's own words: *"I propose to treat education as an investment in man and to treat its consequences as a form of capital... it is a form of capital if it renders a productive service*

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<sup>44</sup> The term capital neoliberalism aims to emphasise the processes of production, distribution and consumption within neoliberalism, while the term neoliberalism aims to underscore the praxis of implementing the rationale of free market, state-market interaction and welfare provision.

*of value to the economy. The principal hypothesis underlying this treatment of education is that some important increases in national income are a consequence of additions to the stock of this form of capital.”* (Schulz, 1960: 1). Accordingly, *“The decisive factors of production in improving the welfare of poor people are not space, energy and cropland; the decisive factor is the improvement in population quality...”* (Schultz, 1980)

Largely, this came from the observation that people that are more educated tend to have comparatively higher incomes, thus pushing the emphasis away from structural constraints and drawing it to individuals’ freedom to decide about their education, health and consumption habits. This was a breaking point in western economies and thenceforth occurred *“a profound transformation of the public discourse surrounding education policy...”* (Holden and Biddle, 2017: 1) and concomitantly on the evolution of welfare provision.

A parallel change in economics occurred during the 1960s when another Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman, representative of the second School of Chicago, argued that the government’s support towards the poor had to be done through *“market”* in order to be aware of the costs of maintaining *“the poor”* (Villarespe, 2010). The ideology that people in poverty are a burden to the state and society underpinned this economic perspective aimed at improving the financial health of the government. In Friedman’s attempt to evidence the economic cost of supporting *“the poor”*, he advocated for a narrow welfare provision based on monetary terms. These two steps in economic thought, coupled with the support and advancement by international donors such as the IDB, the IMF and the WB, were the building blocks later in the 1990s for the design of *Prospera*.

The import substitution strategy adopted in Latin American and Sub-Saharan countries in the aftermath of the World War II signalled one of the varieties of neoliberalism (Jessop, 2013)<sup>45</sup>. However, in Mexico this type of neoliberalism came to

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<sup>45</sup> According to Bob Jessop there were four varieties of neoliberalism that evolved in the post-war era: *“The Atlantic Fordism in advanced capitalist economies, import-substitution industrialisation*



a halt during the 1970s. Accordingly, public deficit spending and the oil industry boom leveraged by external indebtedness underpinned the accelerated economic growth characteristic of the 1970s, referred to as the “*managed prosperity*” phase<sup>46</sup>. The passing from one stage to the other marked a shift from a protection of national industry towards an increased participation of the State in the economy as main national development strategy<sup>47</sup>. This shift exemplifies a “*conceptualization of neoliberalization as a variegated, geographically uneven and path-dependent process...*” (Brenner et al., 2010: 327), which highlights that “*These path-dependent effects are political and ideological as well as economic.*” (Jessop, 2013: 72).

The liberalisation of the economy and the global market integration of the late 1980s and especially the 1990s was an attempt to deal with the stagnation of the early 1980s, heir to the 1970s “*managed prosperity*” phase. To some degree, this paved the way for a different form of neoliberalism from that of the import substitution strategy. In fact, the financial crisis of the 1990s, which engulfed the so-called semi-periphery, put neoliberal globalism to a test, and pushed the orientation of the neoliberal paradigm to a more social and regulatory system, which impacted emerging economies’ restructuring as was the case with Mexico. However, this reorientation had arguably less impact on the global North. The economic reforms in the global South during those decades hindered growth rates.

The result of this was a movement away from the more orthodox neoliberalism, wherein international financial institutions started advocating for a more regulatory, social and ultimately “*humane*” approach. However, this was not in the ways envisioned in waves one and two of social policy in Mexico, which focused on a

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*in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, export-oriented growth in East Asia and, in a quite different but related context, state socialism in the Soviet Bloc, China and Indo-China.*” (Jessop, 2013: 70).

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the economic growth during this phase was overall higher than later “*neoliberal*” decades (Gollas, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> The public deficit expenditure underpinned the economic growth of the 1970s, which drove inflation from 17.9% in 1971 to 92.6% by 1982. The government attempted to deal with such deficit via public debt that in turn passed from 19.6 million dollars in 1976 to 58.8 million dollars in 1982 (Gurria, 1993; Aspe, 1993).

more interventionist approach of the state. Rather, the emphasis was on targeting “*the poor*” through an activation logic mainly focused on education, health and nutrition.

John Williamson and his 10 policy recommendations, commonly referred to as the Washington Consensus,<sup>48</sup> built on this approach. In fact, since the 1960s the WB has pushed for an anti-poverty approach based on three broad policy recommendations: economic growth, development of human capital and social safety nets for vulnerable groups. There, the key was good governance, regulatory arrangements, and adopting some “*pro-poor*” measures, particularly implemented in the semi-periphery. The heir to this was the development of human capital formation theories and more recently the development of the human capital index by the WB (WB, 2018).

Accordingly, in the 1990s the WB intensified its focus on human capital formation to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Villarespe, 2010). Thus, the WB and to some extent the IMF advanced the agenda of CCT programmes across the region and eventually at a global scale.<sup>49</sup> This was in line with concerns about economic growth and the role of individual choice in the functioning of the market. Accordingly, the WB in a 2016 report stated, “*CCT enables households to take up investments that they would not otherwise take up... CCT contributes to levelling the playing field through greater access to basic services today and increasing income opportunities tomorrow... CCT has been used to promote... healthy lifestyle habits that would not emerge without behavioural conditioning... they financially incentivize poor households to enroll their children and keep them in the school... CCT programs frequently... rationalize the use of scarce resources and improve program targeting efficiency...*” (WB, 2016: 141-143)

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<sup>48</sup> The Washington Consensus refers to the 10 policy recommendations “*about whose proper deployment Washington can muster a reasonable degree of consensus*” (Williamson, 2002:7). Those refer to tax reform; positive interest rates determined by the market; reduction of public expenditure; fiscal discipline; a competitive exchange rate supposedly consistent with macroeconomic objectives in the mid-term; privatisation; deregulation; promotion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); and property rights.

<sup>49</sup> For a thorough revision of the role of the WB and IMF in the implementation and constant evaluation of CCT programmes see: (WB, 2018; 2017a, 2017b; IMF, 2017).

To that end, financial institutions granted important sums of money to developing economies that adhered to such policy recommendations. The number of policy research reports by financial institutions<sup>50</sup> and government reports<sup>51</sup> referring to the paramount support by international financial institutions – including the IDB, IMF and WB – are reflections of the pairing between the financial sector and policymaking endorsing CCT. Effectively, the support of those institutions together with the underlying rationale of *Prospera* are reflections of how neoliberalism operates, as analysed in the following chapter. In fact, it is possible to trace neoliberal thought from CCT programmes. In particular, the underlying assumptions, implementation and functioning of *Prospera* reflect neoliberalism, as analysed in chapters five, six, and seven.

It is worth emphasising that the 2008 financial crisis marked yet another movement in capitalist neoliberalism. Barely more than a decade after the 1990s crisis, this financial meltdown represented arguably the worst disruption to global economic order that accelerated *“the drive toward a multipolar globalization riding on a more heterodox neoliberalism.”* (Öniş and Güven, 2010: 2). This was primarily a global systemic crisis with national-scale repercussions, as opposed to the 1990s crisis that was a national crisis with secondary systemic repercussions (Öniş and Güven, 2010). The 2008 crisis proved *“once and for all the fallacy of the simplistic late twentieth century variant of neoliberal globalization, namely, the ideal of a world profitably united behind the reign of self-regulating markets led by corporations headquartered in a handful of rich economies”* (Öniş and Güven, 2010: 20), which has been replaced by a heterodox liberalism and multipolar globalism. It could be argued that this crisis and in particular the way in which governments in Europe have dealt with it represented the end of the social face of neoliberalism. Attempts to privatise health care in the US and the stringent

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<sup>50</sup> Examples of policy research reports include: (de la Brière and Rawlings, 2006; Fiszbein, 2009; Evans and Popova, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Examples of the reports that the government of Mexico has issued are: (Presidencia, 2005; 2009; 2012).

austerity cuts in the welfare regime of the UK signal this new movement within neoliberalism, one with a less *“humane”* face.

These seemingly erratic movements of capitalist neoliberalism mark the *“unevenly developing crisis-tendencies, contradictions and resistances... (wherein) trial-and-error improvisation in specific spatio-temporal contexts and conjunctures in all their messiness produces immense variation in neoliberalisms.”* (Jessop, 2013: 73). Accordingly, the financial crises that societies have had to endure, the shifts in international and ultimately political arrangements and more importantly for this thesis, the type of state-society interaction and welfare provision are reflections of the *“variegated neoliberalisation”* (Peck, 2013a). Interestingly, while different in scale these variegated processes share important commonalities. This can be seen in their prescriptive continuity in development policy (Öniş and Güven, 2010), their *“worldwide reorganisation of regulatory arrangements... that can only be reproduced and advanced through historically and geographically specific politico-institutional formations, strategies and struggles...”* (Peck, 2013b: 1093); and their crisis-driven nature inherited from capitalism (Harvey, 2014). Furthermore, they share a set of assumptions vis-à-vis social development that have embedded and in fact advanced specific types of social policy.

In the case of Mexico, the fourth wave of social policy largely drawn from theories of human capital has come at a high social cost, as chapters five, six and seven analyse. The crux of the matter is that the content of neoliberalism has been embedded within the Mexican welfare system via a set of assumptions and a rationale that punishes defiance and rewards compliance, as discussed in what follows.

#### *2.4.2. The content of neoliberalism*

Approaches to neoliberalism have spanned from looking at it as a hegemonic idea (Gill, 2000), or as a *“package of new ideas that would restore the liberal faith and redirect the*

*course of Western civilization*" (Turner, 2007: 2).<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, other authors approach it from a policy perspective (Stiglitz, 2000; Williamson, 2002; Sachs, 2005) tracing its origins to the 1970s and narrowing it down to a number of reforms.

However, here the approach is that while it encompasses both of those perspectives neoliberalism is foremost a paradigm (Fuchs and Monticelli 2018; Harvey, 2003; Hardt and Negri, 2018) that reproduces the dynamics of the circulation of capital, as discussed in what follows and analysed throughout the findings chapters. Contrary to common understandings of neoliberalism that approach it largely as an ideology of "*market fundamentalism*" that lacks morals or values (Stiglitz, 2000), this thesis approaches it as a paradigm wherein the contradictions as well as its leverage power lies precisely in the values and ethic it defends (Amable, 2011; Peck, 2013a; 2013b). There, competition is the key for its own deployment, based on the idea of a "*free individual*" as opposed to a "*limiting community*"<sup>53</sup> that is liable for reducing competition.

Thus, the neoliberal paradigm builds on, but also transcends, classical liberalism. This is the case because in contrast with its predecessor, which criticises morality, neoliberalism evolves from a particular basis of morality. That is to say, it builds its own justification and legitimisation through an ethic of freedom grounded on individualism that perpetuates and extends through competition in the market.

However, what has evolved is the state-market relationship and the forms of welfare provision envisioned. Before the 1990s crisis, the movement was towards

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<sup>52</sup> Despite the differing approaches of neoliberalism as an ideology, there are four core principles. The first is that the market as the most efficient allocator of resources generates prosperity, liberty and efficiency of production. Concomitantly, that government failures are more detrimental than those of the market. The second is the principle of minimum state intervention. Accordingly, the state should focus on maintaining order, providing public goods and safeguarding the market order (Hayek, 1960). The third is the importance of the rule of the law to secure stability and social cohesion that is paramount for individual liberties (Hayek, 1973). The fourth is the relevance of private property and its corollary the free-market (Mises, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> The idea that focusing on communities limits the potential of individuals arose from a critique of the paternalistic approach characteristic of Latin America mainly during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

stringent policies aimed at rolling back the state, cuts on welfare provision and liberalising the economy. The economic growth sought primarily by international financial institutions, and to a certain extent achieved during the late 1970s and 1980s, legitimised those moves. Even so, the economic crisis in the semi-periphery during the 1990s put those tenets into question. As a result, and as previously suggested, a more nuanced approach to the economy emerged that posited principles of good governance, market regulation and human capital formation at the forefront. The political and social context in Mexico eased the implementation and rolling out of CCT.

As previously mentioned, the 2008 global financial crisis has advanced a more multipolar globalism and heterodox liberalism, and in the case of Europe it could be argued that it is a step away from the nuanced social approach of 1990s neoliberalism. This is evidenced by the growing emphasis on austerity measures put into practice particularly in Western Europe as in the case of the UK, Greece and Spain. Despite those movements within capitalist neoliberalism, it requires a system of values in order to function correctly (Weber, 2013). With neoliberalism, the same logic is at play. Individuals internalise competition through individualism for which abiding by values of resilience, self-reliance and accountability is not only morally necessary, but also fundamental for participating in modern western societies. Accordingly, competition enacted individually pervades as a superior moral standard that will bring about common benefits.

Such processes reinforce the social structures on which neoliberalism rests. Hence, by taking competition from the once exclusive economic discussion to the realm of morality, neoliberalism shields itself from political influence, thus treating any criticism as unfounded, misleading or reactionary. Therefore, in order for competition to unfold in society, neoliberalism requires individuals to abide by those values concomitant with certain attitudes and behaviours.

Translated into individual behaviour, competition requires individuals to be self-sufficient, aspiring, and resilient in order to acquire freedom. With neoliberalism,

freedom is achievable through the exercise of individualism within the market. Then, neoliberalism transforms competition into success, by deploying freedom of individuals and personal choices as yardsticks of social justice.

To summarise, neoliberalism transforms the enunciation of the entitlement theory of Marx in the Critique of the Gotha Program (Marx, 1994), and states: from each according to their commitment to society, to each according to effort. Under the neoliberal rationale, success is individualised and reachable through free competition – free inasmuch as it is exempt from government intervention – which will ultimately bring about social development. This is how neoliberalism shapes the content and purpose of social policy, as analysed in what follows.

If members of society fail to improve their living conditions, it is the result of reduced human capital or insufficient effort. Similarly, neoliberalism externalises failure from its own rationale by blaming rent-seeking behaviour, corruption or lack of political will. Thus, the policy recommendation follows that governments require further private investment and more accountability. The purpose of social policy aligned with neoliberalism is to facilitate that human capital formation. Hence, the way in which neoliberal values and norms are embedded in a given system occurs in its interplay with social policy, which is the focus in what follows.

#### *2.4.3. Neoliberalism and social policy*

According to Amable, neoliberalism is able to de-legitimise collective action by reification of labour and by considering market results as just (Amable, 2011). Therefore, with neoliberalism public intervention is justified only if it is to strengthen or bring back a “*fair game*” of competition. This is the particularity of the current paradigm called neoliberalism: a social order based on a morality of free and just competition among individuals. A morality based on rewarding individuals according to performance, which will ultimately allow them to become the best version of themselves.

Under neoliberalism, social protection passes from one of redistribution to one of “levelling the playing field” in exchange for something. This is the “*quid pro quo*” condition satisfied in negative taxation proposed by Hayek and Friedman (Hayek, 1960; Friedman, 1977). These are indeed the core assumptions and roots of conditionalities established through welfare provision advanced by the WB and the IMF particularly during the late 1980s, after the failure of the structural adjustment programmes.

As previously discussed, the understanding of poverty shifted from structural causes to individual capacities to escape poverty. Accordingly, the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico pushed forward the idea of conditional money upon certain behaviours as key to poverty alleviation, as previously discussed. This fundamentally affected the state-individual relationship from one based on provision of entitlements vis-à-vis demographic and group characteristics to one where the exercise of citizenship became inseparable from the state’s surveillance of personal behaviour.

This took its form in the rise of social rights acquired through responsibility scrutinised by the state, on the promise of benefits or threat of sanctions. Thus, in line with the dynamics of capitalism, CCT as a form of welfare provision has come to represent the predominance of a market-led logic driving social policy. The clear-cut link between this and neoliberalism is the logic of self-reliance with which individuals, provided they have diligently invested in their human capital, will escape poverty.

This logic reproduced and reinforced throughout the monthly workshops, talks and health clinic visits previously discussed, goes hand in hand with values of resilience, accountability, and a narrow approach to hard work and effort alleged to be cornerstones of poverty alleviation. As chapter six analyses, the framing of poverty from the CCT programme *Prospera* advances a very specific type of agency. There, the participation in the market contours the meaning of individuality and narrows agency in its relation to the welfare system. Thus, it perceives the agency of welfare recipients in relation to their commitment to society that manifests in the investment in their human capital to enhance their chances for future employability, and as such embrace



the risk of their actions as well as their omissions. The result of this was a *Third Way* approach of internalised reciprocity on the individual-community relationship (Giddens, 1998).

The neoliberal Mexican model of social policy - influenced by the IMF and the WB - of "*rewiring the poor*", builds on such a relationship. However, it takes it a step further by allowing an "*ex-post facto*"<sup>54</sup> intervention that aims to promote adaptability and creation of capacities aligned with the labour market and in that way promote competition and self-reliance, a specific type of social policy developed in line with the neoliberal ethos of ethics and values of individualism and competition previously discussed and further analysed in chapters five, six and seven.

By applying the values of capitalist neoliberalism to a life in poverty, the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico has pushed the individual to internalise the ethic of competition and the attitudes of individualism. Thus, social policy appropriates the self-reliance rationale of complying with conditionalities as intrinsic to its purpose and imposes it onto its targeted population. As a result, beneficiaries internalise the attitudes and behaviours of a "*good citizen*", knowing that failing to comply risks losing their benefits, as analysed through this thesis.

The idea of a "*good citizen*" manifests in a series of actions (discussed in the following section) subject to social approval that in the case of CCT programme *Prospera* takes the form of institutional scrutiny. Thus, the internalisation of individualism that receiving welfare benefits entails reinforces the structure of neoliberalism and mirrors the dynamics of capitalism, while it reinforces patriarchal and labour exploitation, as chapter five analyses.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ex-post facto* here defines a particular relationship between the state and welfare recipients wherein welfare support is provided once and only if beneficiaries demonstrate through their behaviour that they deserve it.

This is a neoliberal type of social policy designed to advance a market rationale that measures individuals in relation to their performance with regard to the economy. In this way, measures of poverty and policies to target it are not mere administrative remedies but instruments of a neoliberal agenda pushed by international donors and political and economic actors. These political and economic actors are vested with specific interests acting within the frontiers of a given country who aim at perpetuating the system that has allowed them to accumulate capital through the dispossession of societies (Harvey, 2003).

For the past twenty years, the neoliberal ideology prevailing in decision makers and the media has reproduced the idea that individuals and not society are responsible for their own fortune or fate (Damian, 2010). This paradigm is the engine of the programme *Prospera* and it is thus, in the light of its theoretical underpinnings, that this thesis analyses it.

The implications of government's understanding of success and failure are beyond mere rhetoric. Accordingly, "*Policies must no longer be treated as measures designed, albeit inadequately, to improve the human condition, but rather as predominant causes of the deterioration of that condition*" (Townsend and Gordon, 2002: xiii). The perception that CCT programmes are somehow bulletproof risks advancing a functionalist approach to social policy that focuses merely on nurturing human capital. Thus, from the vantage point of policy evaluations, *Prospera* mirrors neoliberalism inasmuch as the ethos that treats criticism to neoliberalism as unfounded and reactionary, as previously analysed. In the case of CCT this takes the form of robust reports that arguably shield the programme from failure.

*Prospera* builds on the assumptions that people can escape poverty through their human capital wherein the state should provide the incentives and constraints to nourish that human capital. The IMF and the WB with the support of government officials orchestrated the CCT programmes based on providing money in return for the fulfilment of certain conditions or otherwise withdrawing it. All of this resembles the

old discussion that took place back in the 17th and 18th century in England regarding whether the economic incentives towards the poor discourages work, thus focussing the debate around the deserving and the undeserving poor.

To summarise, neoliberalism's ethos embedded in the Mexican system of social provision produced conditional cash transfer programmes, which built on self-discipline, commitment and effort. Accordingly, neoliberal social policy individualises failure and externalises harm insofar as it takes market fairness as a dogma, as previously discussed. Successful individuals thus comply with the very important task of reinforcing the *status quo* (Ferguson et al., 2002), for which social policy reproduces and pushes the idea of successful individuals onto welfare recipients. In order to analyse this, the next step is to develop a theory capable of linking the dynamics of capitalist neoliberalism with social policy through the lived experiences of people in poverty. That is the purpose of the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the evolution of conditional cash transfer programmes and their main tenets and traced its links with neoliberalism. It first characterised the four waves of social policy in Mexico. To that end, it discussed the historical evolution of social policy in Mexico from the first wave of social provision in the 1970s to the implementation of the fourth wave that is CCT. Thus, it investigated the forms in which the neoliberal ethos gained momentum in Latin America after the structural adjustment programmes and with the theoretical and economic support from international donors such as the IDB, IMF and in particular the WB. Thereby, it discussed the theoretical tenets behind CCT *Prospera*, its evolution over the past twenty years and in particular its functioning and expansion. In so doing, it emphasised CCT's approach to poverty alleviation through human capital formation and focus on life cycles with an emphasis on women and children of school age. It then analysed the literature around CCT and advanced the argument that the wide variety of methodologies and institutions reviewing it have served to advance the specific significance of CCT as a key poverty-

alleviation strategy worldwide. Afterwards, it analysed the link between the evolution of economic thought in western economies and the establishment of the first CCT programme. In particular, it traced the specific ways in which neoliberalism was embedded in the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico.

All in all, this thesis will make the case to counter individualistic explanations of poverty and distribution that entail attributing the main responsibility of poverty to “*the poor*” (Lister, 2004) as CCT programmes such as *Prospera* advance. To that end, the following chapter will build a theory of alienation applied to the experience of poverty under the neoliberal paradigm.

## Chapter III A theory of alienation in poverty

### Introduction

This chapter develops a theoretical understanding of a life in poverty. Specifically, it builds from the material hardships that form the core and the symbolic/relational experience that constitutes the rim of the poverty wheel (Lister, 2004), but it advances it by operationalising the specific mechanisms of their interaction. To that end, it builds from critical realism (Fuchs, 2018a; 2018b; Harvey, 2003; 2016; 2018; Lefebvre, 1968; 2003; Marx, 1904; 1988; 1990; 1993; 1994; Yibing, 2011) to explain the mechanisms through which the movements of capitalism (Harvey, 2014; Marx, 1971) represent a loss or reduction of control over the structural dynamics that contour people's lives with regard to the satisfaction of needs. In particular, this chapter sets forth a theory grounded in the production, circulation and distribution of products from the vantage point of people in poverty. The point of this chapter is to develop a theoretical apparatus that explains the contradictions of a life in poverty. Specifically, it theoretically sets in motion the tensions between the material reality and the relational/symbolic experience of poverty. It does so by putting forward an analysis of the dynamics of capitalist neoliberalism (Ollman, 2003; Harvey, 2003; 2014) in its interaction with people's lived experience of it. Drawing on the analysis regarding space-time variations of neoliberalism (Jessop 2013; 2014; 2015; Peck, 2010a; 2010b; 2012; 2013a), this thesis is located in urban and rural Mexico from the vantage point of welfare recipients, due to the focus on the relationship between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty. Therefore, the experience of welfare recipients will be at the forefront and in fact will bring the theory into real motion.

Thus, this chapter starts by reviewing core discussions around absolute and relative understandings of poverty, and what that means for the dichotomous "*poor*"

and “*non-poor*” discourse. It then discusses the evolution of measures, definitions and understandings of poverty in Mexico and their implications for *Prospera*. This section then develops an approach to poverty. The second section positions a conceptualisation of needs and agency in their interaction with the dynamics of capitalism. In particular, it starts by critically analysing prevalent mainstream approaches to needs that have served the purpose of misrecognising the life trajectories of people in poverty. It then develops an understanding of needs grounded in critical realism. These needs relate to a definition of agency and poverty that align with the proposition of a theory of alienation, and this theory will be the focus of the last section of this chapter. Then, by building on that conceptualisation of needs, it develops an approach to agency vis-à-vis capitalist neoliberalism. It first engages with mainstream understandings of agency and some of their more nuanced developments and then posits a critical understanding of agency. The last section theoretically sets in motion the theory of alienation. It starts by analysing the link between needs, agency and poverty, and then provides an operational understanding of alienation as an explanatory tool of the lived reality that accounts for the material hardship and the relational symbolic dimensions of poverty. It then develops the three manifestations of alienation: those of alienation from resources; alienation from oneself; and alienation from others, with an emphasis on their concomitant mechanisms, internal dynamics and contradictions.

### **3.1. Poverty and welfare**

Capital needs to continue expanding (Harvey, 2018a; 2018b), and despite its constant crisis capitalism has adapted and in fact taken advantage of that crisis (Peck, 2013a). Accordingly, states have become the field of stringent neoliberal policies wherein social welfare provision “*cannot be separated from the wider social dynamic. It is intimately tied to the political and economic processes of capitalism, yet at the same time it cannot simply be reduced to the needs of economic production.*” (Ferguson et al., 2002: 28). Notwithstanding, the rolling out of welfare legitimises capitalism while at the same time it reproduces its contradictions, as the findings chapters analyse. Accordingly, welfare “*seems to represent an arena where the market does not necessarily dominate and it*

*apparently proves that the expansion of capitalism benefits us all.*" (Ferguson et al., 2002: 31). Thus, the structuring of welfare provision, and the fight against poverty thereof, have become paramount for the reproduction of capitalism.

This section develops a theoretical approach to poverty. It starts the discussion with an appraisal of the absolute and relative approaches to poverty that establishes the ground for the rest of the section. The second part investigates the growing influence of the "poor" and "non-poor" dichotomy of welfare provision with particular attention to the CCT programme *Prospera*. Then, it discusses the evolution of poverty research in Mexico that paves the way for the analysis of needs and agency that is the focus of the next section.

### *3.1.1. The poverty debate*

The longstanding discussion of poverty has traditionally been divided by the dichotomy of absolute and relative poverty. The pioneers of poverty research Seebohm Rowntree and Charles Booth largely focused on bad behaviour of "the poor" (intemperance) and the "want and squalor" in which they lived. Rowntree's two lines of poverty (primary and secondary) identified people living on the first line as lacking the material aspects to subsist. Rowntree's poverty line therefore implicitly criticised the then common view of poverty as a consequence of misfortune or bad providence and in turn shifted the discussion to people's personal deficits in acquiring higher income. Accordingly, "*before we can arrive at an estimate of the number of those who are living in "primary" poverty in York, we must ascertain what income is required by families of different sizes to provide the minimum of food, clothing, and shelter needful for the maintenance of merely physical health*" (Rowntree, 1901: 87). Furthermore, with the secondary measure of poverty, he emphasised "*the conditions under which the families were living*" (Veit-Wilson, 1986: 505).

Conversely, the evolution of the relative approach to poverty, largely pioneered by Peter Townsend, was a critique of the absolute understanding of poverty that rests on basic needs, disregarding context and socio-cultural factors affecting a life in

poverty. An acknowledgement of the relative characteristics of poverty is an understanding of how *“Their conditions [those of individuals, families and groups in poverty] are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns and activities”* (Townsend, 1979: 31).

Accordingly, relative poverty takes place when people lack access to amenities, nutrition, services and standards as per customary behaviours. Furthermore, it entails a recognition of the difference between material deprivation that refers to goods and amenities and social deprivation that refers to activities and relationships (Townsend, 1979). Therefore, relative poverty encompasses the ability to participate in society and approaches needs and their concomitant satisfaction vis-à-vis production, distribution and consumption of products. It contends that such an approach to poverty and needs relates to an agency whose exercise occurs socially.

Thus, absolute poverty offers the possibility of comparing poverty despite context; in other words, that poverty is present below an absolute threshold despite cultural or social differences. In contrast, the concept of relative poverty entails the limitation of comparing it only within a given society at a given time. Ultimately, relative poverty is a call to account for the changing circumstances across time and from one society and culture to another and to avoid oversimplifications or claims that extreme poverty no longer exists, for instance when comparing current material circumstances with those prevalent in previous modes of production.

A renewed effort to conceptualise poverty came from breaking the absolute-relative dichotomy. Several authors (Alkire, 2002; Nussbaum, 2011) have argued from different approaches that there is a minimum absolute level of poverty yet the relative aspect of it cannot be neglected. Also relevant is the prominence of a growing corpus of literature that approaches poverty from the vantage point of citizenship and social rights. Drawing from a human rights and in some cases a capabilities approach, it aims to address social inequalities via a type of welfare provision tailored to meet those



rights. Accordingly, it approaches poverty from the vantage point of unmet rights and understands agency in relation to developed capabilities of citizens. However, this approach fails to account for the variety of dimensions that constitute people's personal experiences of the material world, particularly in relation to the production process that contours the (non)satisfaction of needs.

Similarly, feminist literature has shed some light on the shame and stigma as well as the lived experiences of power relations largely within patriarchal domination (Beier, 2018) of women living in poverty (Molyneux, 2006). Accordingly, they have rightly highlighted the long-standing marginalised experience of the "*wage-less of the world*" (Federici, 2018: 468) that has been paramount for the reproduction of society. Notwithstanding, while these approaches are relevant to extract from social relations the instances and mechanisms of women's historical subordination compared to men, they are insufficient to explain poverty and people's experiences of it.

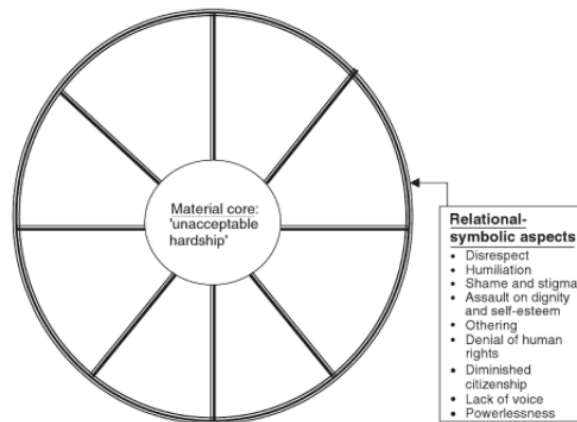
In fact, a recognition of women's experiences of poverty is at the same time an understanding of patriarchy's subsumption within capitalism. That is, a theorisation of the formal and real subsumption of capital is a recognition that different forms of domination and exploitation that existed before capitalism such as patriarchy are not by-products of capitalism. But at the same time, that those structures of domination preceding capitalism transform and become part of capitalist societies "*creating, for instance, a new family structure along with a complex and resilient system of sexual division of labour.*" (Hardt and Negri, 2018: 444). Thus, gender is not subordinate to capitalist rule but it has become a constitutive part of capitalism, and as such, capitalism is essentially patriarchal. This is a "*recognition that all social relations, not just labour, tend to be subsumed under capital (which) forces us, then, to theorise the dynamics among class, race, gender, and other axes of subordination*" (Hardt and Negri, 2018: 442).

This is an essential realisation given that while women and men suffer different layers of capitalist exploitation (that is in the recognition of patriarchy's subsumption within capitalism) poverty is first and foremost about unsatisfied needs. Moreover,

while feminist literature has acknowledged the importance of household work within capitalism (Beier, 2018), poverty is not a result of gender inequalities. Poverty corresponds to the particularities of the current mode of production that rest on the accumulation of capital through the dispossession of societies (Harvey, 2003; 2014) of which women's exploitation is only a part, albeit an important one.

Thus, there is a need for a theory that accounts for those differences, but that is also capable of analysing the mechanisms that link unmet needs and people's experiences thereof. That is, a theory that accounts for the unacceptable hardships of poverty, linking it with the relational/symbolic experience of poverty according to specific socio-cultural relations. The poverty wheel (Chart 1) provides an advantageous entry point to account for the material core and the symbolic rim of poverty. However, while able to graphically depict the interdependence of the material and symbolic, the sketch of the wheel developed by Ruth Lister is unable to explain how these two operate. The theory of alienation in poverty puts the wheel in motion and provides the mechanisms through which the material core relates with the symbolic rim.

**Chart 1:** The wheel of poverty



*Source: Taken from (Lister, 2004: 8)*

The form in which socially available resources relate with the moments of capital (production, distribution and circulation) contours people's lives. Accordingly,

the insufficiency or lack of resources and opportunities to satisfy needs in order to lead a life of one's own choosing relates with the personal experience and internalisation of such unsatisfied needs. That is to say, a life in poverty is characterised by a reduced or limited power over one's own living conditions (both material and symbolic). In that sense, and as further elaborated in this chapter, needs and agency are mutually constitutive elements that in their interaction with the current mode of production are essential to explaining a life in poverty.

Accordingly, the material hardship that constitutes the core of poverty refers to all the material conditions required for the satisfaction of socially and culturally defined needs (Lister, 2004). However, this material hardship is intrinsically related to the symbolic rim of poverty that is the internalisation by individuals of unsatisfied needs. Notwithstanding, this individual internalisation is socially constrained. What is more, the socialisation of poverty through language and images of the other, *"the poor"*, entails that poverty, while materially grounded, needs to be understood also as a social relation, mainly defined by the *"non-poor"* *"whose discourse, attitudes and actions can (and do) have an impact on how poverty is experienced"* (Lister, 2004: 100). In that sense, poverty is also a social construction contoured by interactions mediated by language and images of the other, *"the poor"*.

Hence, the process of othering by the *"non-poor"* not only establishes a separating line between *"us"* versus *"them"* but also and especially stigmatises the so-called *"poor"* in a way that worsens their situation and increases social pressure over them as *"the other"*. The othering process creates within the *"othered"* a feeling of shame that pushes people further away from society, which hinders their satisfaction of needs.

Accordingly, the deployment of othering and shame over people in poverty has its grounding in society's definition of worth. As previously suggested, with capitalist neoliberalism the ethos reifies individual worth and assigns it a content defined in terms of material possessions. This in turn produces a success and failure narrative based on economic resources that stigmatises people in poverty. The particular power

dynamics resulting from this render inequalities on which poverty and ultimately capitalism rest.

To summarise, shame, othering, stigma and unequal power dynamics are powerful tools of control that, coupled with the material hardships of a life in poverty, hinder people's power over their living conditions. The resulting symbolic experience of this is reduced self-esteem, powerlessness, disrespect, assault on dignity, lack of voice, diminished community, hindered social cohesion and isolation. The particular mechanisms through which these take place and the symbolic internalisation of the material hardships is the focus of part three of this chapter. However, a critical appraisal of poverty first requires a review of conceptualisations of poverty by the Mexican government in order to then relate this to the welfare system, which is the focus in what follows.

### *3.1.2. Poverty approaches in Mexico*

Despite recent developments around the multidimensional definition of poverty (CONEVAL, 2010), the definition of poverty in Mexico has fallen short in accounting for the structural dynamics that contour the experiences of people in poverty, their satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency. In fact, as chapter one explained, the evolution of the definitions of poverty in Mexico has gone hand in hand with the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), its concomitant consolidation of the nation-state, and the establishment of the roots of the political party that ruled the country for 71 years.

During the first half and part of the second half of the twentieth century, there was no definition or measure of poverty. As a result, any effort from the government back then was insufficient and the limited social spending ended up wasted in small-scale, low-impact programmes. This was a reflection of the lack of a strategy or a programme targeted at reducing poverty or alleviating needs. Furthermore, during those decades, there was a transition from an individualist neo-classical approach to fighting poverty to a communitarian neo-Keynesian approach, as discussed in chapter

one. Thereafter, an import substitution strategy paved the way for the institutionalisation of social policy and the first efforts to define and measure poverty<sup>55</sup>.

In fact, the first government estimation of poverty used the “*Normative Basket of Essential Satisfiers*” (NBES)<sup>56</sup>, which includes goods and services such as culture, recreation and transportation in relation to the satisfaction of what they called essential needs. Furthermore, this approach also took into account the resources to satisfy needs such as gas, electricity and a refrigerator among others. This goods and services approach to poverty alleviation included the dynamics required for subsistence farming and fishing, and private and public transfers. This approach to fighting poverty put centre stage a more robust understanding of individual needs in relation to society and accounted for the role of public and private institutions. Nevertheless, it drew on an expert-led understanding of needs, poverty and agency, with no consideration of people’s time and their own experience of poverty, let alone the role of social dynamics such as the discourses and symbolic violence exercised over people in poverty.

As opposed to that first governmental estimate of poverty, the founding father of the CCT *Prospera*, Santiago Levy, developed his own approach. While critical of the NBES, he built on the “*Normative Basket of Food*” (NBF) of the General Co-ordination of the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalised Groups (COPLAMAR, by its initials in Spanish)<sup>57</sup> but argued that the cost of it did not consider subsistence fishing and agriculture and thus, he argued, it did not include the minimum monetary cost of the basket. Therefore, he calculated the minimum cost of the NBF and included self-consumption by adding an expansion factor of 25 per cent of the basket, which constituted the extreme poverty line. Thereafter, he obtained the moderate poverty line

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<sup>55</sup> For a more thorough revision of different approaches, definitions and measures of poverty in Mexico see Appendix 9.

<sup>56</sup> NBES was the procedure followed to define the poverty line through the approach of normative family budgets.

<sup>57</sup> The federal government created COPLAMAR in 1977 and its focus was to articulate actions that would allow marginalised rural areas to have sufficient material and organisational elements to achieve a more equitable participation in the national wealth. For a more thorough revision of the history of institutions and programmes of rural development, see (Herrera, 2013).

through the NBAS (Trejo et al., 2003). Santiago Levy's definition and measure of poverty, largely influenced by the WB and the IMF, was fundamental for the development of the biggest and largest social programme in Mexico, *Prospera*. Thus, this approach built on mainstream economics, with an emphasis on income as a proxy to understand people's subsistence needs and ultimately poverty. As such, it aimed to activate agency mainly through more economic resources. It is no coincidence that this definition strikes a chord with making government support conditional on particular behaviours around health, nutrition and education. In fact, the approach to poverty alleviation of *Prospera* draws from Levy's earlier work on measuring poverty with an emphasis on income, understanding needs from human capital perspective, and activating agency through a "carrot and stick" approach.

During the 1990s, the National Population Council (CONAPO, by its initials in Spanish) systematised efforts<sup>58</sup> to construct an index to analyse social disadvantages or shortages the population was facing. This was the marginalisation index whose emphasis was on geographically locating marginalisation<sup>59</sup> (CONAPO, 2013). Furthermore, the goal was to provide measurable data to reduce deprivations experienced by the Mexican population in relation to four dimensions: basic education, dwelling conditions, demographic dispersion and income. Finally, this index allowed to disaggregate data at national, regional and local level by identifying the most lagging areas per each one of the four dimensions.

In a similar vein, CONEVAL developed the social lag index, a measure "that summarises four social lag indicators (education, health, basic household services and assets, and dwelling spaces) into a single index" (CONEVAL, 2016: 2) via the principal components analysis. From the year 2000 social lag has been operationalised by "an index that "allows to order federal entities, municipalities and localities from highest to

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<sup>58</sup> One of the first efforts to operationalize the marginalisation index was the project "Regional inequality and municipal marginalisation in Mexico" (CONAPO, 1994).

<sup>59</sup> CONAPO defines marginalisation as a "structural phenomena that accounts for dimensions, forms and intensity of exclusion in the process of development and enjoyment of the benefits" from of four dimensions: education, dwelling, income and location (CONAPO, 2013).

*lowest degree of social lag at a given time*” (PolitΣia, 2016: 1). Accordingly, this index is pondered in five levels: very low, low, medium, high and very high social lag and it calculates them per three geographical locations: State, municipality and locality. Although this is not a poverty measure, it has been used by government institutions in an attempt to locate the municipalities with socioeconomic lags. Thus, allowing to analyse inequality of coverage of the aforementioned dimensions. To a certain degree this index developed the marginalisation index inasmuch as it accounted for available assets and household services and it measured education in the form of literacy levels. However, it failed to account for the actual quality of health, education or services available at household level.

It is worth mentioning that during the first seven years of CCT in Mexico (1997-2004), both the marginalisation index and the social lag index were used by CCT to target people living in rural and semi-urban areas. In particular, the strengths of these indexes allowed to locate households living in areas with higher levels of marginalisation and social lags, which in turn allowed CCT to focus its limited resources.

Notwithstanding, the first federal effort to homogenise the definition and measure of poverty was during the year 2001<sup>60</sup>. The focus was on monetary poverty to set the poverty line and define three levels of poverty: food, capabilities and patrimonial poverty (Czarnecki, 2013). Accordingly, the first level of poverty relates to *“the impossibility to obtain a basket of food”*. The second level relates to *“not reaching the value of the basket of food plus an estimation of the necessary spending on health, dressing, housing, transportation and education”*. The third level relates to *“not having the resources to obtain a basket of food plus an estimation of the necessary non-food spending considered within the consumption pattern of households”* (CTMP, 2002: 181). This approach to poverty, albeit partially emphasising a relational aspect of poverty,

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<sup>60</sup> This took place during the presidency of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) from the political party National Action Party (PAN). He organised the International Symposium of Concepts and Measures of Poverty, which took place in March 2001. Two years later, the Ministry of Development established the Technical Committee on Poverty Measures that kicked off the efforts to set up a national definition and measure of poverty.

also built on a limited understanding of subsistence needs, a rather narrow approach to the exercise of agency vis-à-vis the economy and a definition of living standards based solely on consumption patterns.

However, it was not until 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2004, that the General Law of Social Development provided the first official federal definition of poverty. Furthermore, it created the first institution in charge of measuring and evaluating poverty and every social policy in the country, the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL). According to CONEVAL, *“From a multidimensional perspective, poverty can be understood as a series of shortcomings in multiple domains such as participation opportunities in collective decisions, the mechanisms of appropriation of resources or entitlements of rights that allow access to physical, human or social capital, among others. Its multidimensional nature, however, does not require taking into account the situations of deprivation in all areas in which the life of a person can be developed. The number and type of dimensions to be considered are directly linked to the way in which the minimal or acceptable living conditions are conceived in order to guarantee a decent living standard for each and every member of a society” (DOF, 2010).* Accordingly, a person is in a situation of multidimensional poverty when *“they have no guaranteed access to at least one of their rights for social development and their income is insufficient to acquire the goods and services that they require to satisfy their needs.” (DOF, 2010).*

Thus, CONEVAL draws on human rights, the well-being approach, and a definition of relational poverty, and for the first time an emphasis on its territorial aspect, and states that: *“The definition of poverty considers the living conditions of the population from three angles: the economic welfare, social rights and territorial context.” (DOF, 2010).* Furthermore, CONEVAL defines the constitutive elements of each of the three areas as well as the basic principles to identify them at a state and local level (Appendix 8) but leaving the identification and selection of beneficiaries of programmes to the discretion of each local government, as long as they abide by its principles. This robust understanding of the relational aspect of poverty underscores



the multiplicity of dimensions that poverty affects. Therefore, its conceptualisation of needs transcends an absolute understanding of the subsistence requirements of individuals and approaches the complexities that characterise individuals socially. Similarly, its approach to agency entails accounting for the social dynamics that determine the access of resources for the satisfaction of those needs, including income.

### *3.1.3. Re-approaching poverty*

Nevertheless, this multidimensional definition of poverty that builds on social rights and wellbeing<sup>61</sup>, while a powerful step in the right direction, fails to recognise the relation between the (multi)dimensions of poverty and the processes behind them. In particular, the official definition of poverty in Mexico is blind to **the circulation of capital that is the dynamics of production, distribution and consumption of products (Harvey, 2014) that determine the depth and extent of poverty.** Additionally, by emphasising social rights and its concomitant cut off points for measuring poverty, it has overemphasised the importance of access to services as opposed to quality of services<sup>62</sup>, and as such privileged rights over needs. Furthermore, it misses a recognition of how society has socialised poverty and people experiencing it, in relation to living standards. Finally, it pays little to no attention to the voices and experiences of people in poverty that are the real experts of poverty (Lister, 2004). This is problematic, because despite its recognition of the social character of needs, it does not account for the interaction between the realisation of needs and the exercise of agency in the production and reproduction of society, as analysed in what follows.

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<sup>61</sup> According to CONEVAL, the cut off points and weights assigned to certain indicators responds to the legal requirement by the Ministry of Development to abide by Mexican regulations and law. Furthermore, their focus on social rights abided by the mandate of the Mexican Constitution. For a thorough revision of the multidimensional measure of poverty, see (CONEVAL, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> It is worth mentioning that the multidimensional measure of poverty by CONEVAL accounts for some indicators of service quality. Such is the case with quality of dwelling measured in terms of construction material and space within dwelling (overcrowding). It also measures quality of household basic services. In the case of water, it measures it in terms of water source (well, river, lake; water pipe; piped from inside or outside the house). It measures quality of electricity in terms of source (lack of electricity, private power plant, solar panel, public service). It also measures quality of household basic services in terms of sewerage (lack of; connected to a pipe; flows into a river, lake or the sea; septic tank; public service). (CONEVAL, 2010).

A parallel development took place in the capital of the country. In 2008, the local government of Mexico City created the Council for the Evaluation of Social Development (Evalua, as it is known in Spanish). Evalua has been in charge of measuring and defining poverty in the capital based on its own methodology. Accordingly, it established a definition and measure of poverty drawn from the Integrated Poverty Measurement Method (MIMIP, by its initials in Spanish) developed by Boltvitnik (Boltvinik, 2005a)<sup>63</sup>. It defined poverty as “*the incapacity of an individual or a household to satisfy with dignity and sufficiently their basic needs related to food, health, education, housing, transportation, recreation, services and spare time (leisure)*” (GODF, 2000: 3). The strength of this definition in contrast to the federal approach to poverty is that it focuses on the universality of services whereas the national definition emphasises liberty (capabilities) of people. Nevertheless, despite emphasising the anthropological relevance of needs and access to resources, it fails to understand people as active subjects and instead looks at them as objects of research. This in turn reproduces a discourse of “*the poor*” that little serves to explain the lived experience of people in poverty.

**Table 9:** Historical definitions of poverty in Mexico

<b>Years</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
Early 1980's	<i>“Normative Basket of Essential Satisfiers”</i> (NBES)	Essential needs – basic goods and services.	Expert-led approach. Disregards the concept of time. Disregards the voice of people in poverty.

<sup>63</sup> Drawing from an anthropological-philosophy the MMIP builds a two-axis theory of poverty: the axis of human flourishing (EFH) and the axis of standard of living (ENV). Accordingly, EFH relates to human poverty and human wealth whereas the ENV relates to economic poverty and economic wealth. Thus, EFH covers all human needs and capabilities, the “complete human being”, whereas ENV covers only the economic conditions of the studied subject vis-à-vis the economic requirements of those needs and capabilities (Boltvinik, 2005).

Early 1990's	<i>Normative Basket Food</i> " (NBF)	Includes self-consumption. Defines a moderate poverty line. Heavily focused on income. Activation of agency through conditioned money.	Disregards socio-cultural factors. Disregards power dynamics. Limited understanding of needs and agency.
2001	<i>Three levels of poverty</i>	Poverty line set in monetary terms. Food, capabilities and patrimonial poverty.	Narrow definition of agency vis-à-vis the economy. Narrow definition of living standards vis-à-vis consumption patterns.
2004	<i>CONEVAL's Multidimensional definition of poverty</i>	Focused on shortcomings related to participation, appropriation of resources, human and social capital. Focused on minimal or acceptable living conditions according to social standards. Heavily driven by human and social rights approach.	Underplays dynamics of production, distribution and consumption of products (i.e. capitalism). Overemphasised access over quality of resources. Completely misses the socialisation of poverty.
2006	<i>EVALUA Mexico City's multidimensional definition of poverty</i>	Anthropological needs. Universal access to services. Emphasis on leisure time.	Downplays socialisation of poverty. Disregards people's experiences of poverty. Incapable of linking material core with relational/symbolic rim.

Despite the great advancements in terms of measuring poverty (Table 9), all have fallen short of explaining the lived reality of poverty. This has been the case on the one hand because none of them accounts for the actual experiences and voices of the real experts, that is to say, those living in poverty. On the other hand, it is due to their failure to recognise poverty as a by-product of the current mode of production, which in turn hinders their capacity to trace the specific mechanisms through which the lack of or limited access to resources (material core) become socialised and thus internalised (relational/symbolic rim) by people in poverty.

In addition to these limitations, there is a profound discontinuity between the definition of *Prospera's* goals and the current definition of poverty by the Mexican government. In fact, the growing importance of *Prospera* in social provision and the fight against poverty, has meant that the measurements of poverty have replaced its

conceptualisation and the *“instrumentation and evaluation of conditional cash transfer programmes have taken the place of the analysis of the theoretical underpinnings that have originated those programmes”* (Villarespe, 2010: 11). This becomes evident in the light of social policy and the increasing provision of different social programmes through and by *Prospera* as well as the growing budget allocated to it in comparison to the budget allotted to development, as chapter two discussed.

Therefore, it becomes crucial to adopt an approach to poverty that builds on a critical appraisal of needs and agency in relation to the capitalist mode of production that contours both poverty and the experiences of people living in poverty. Accordingly, to understand poverty is to acknowledge the socio-historical processes as well as the dynamics of capital that contour the satisfaction of people’s needs. It is also to account for people’s realisation of needs through the exercise of effort, sacrifice and work within both the labour market and the processes of reproduction of society. At the same time, it entails analysing social complexity as fluid rather than fixed. Furthermore, it means acknowledging processes of dominance and exploitation, power relations and imbalances of power. It also means acknowledging the particularities of the (non)satisfaction of needs vis-à-vis the deployment of agency socially that is in the interaction of needs with the political, cultural, economic and social structures. Thus, it entails considering people’s experiences of the circulation of capital in relation to the realisation of individual needs socially and the concomitant exercise of agency. This allows to account for the relation between (non)satisfaction of needs despite individual agency being deployed in society as well as to account for how the (non)satisfaction of needs occurs within the political, cultural, economic and social structures.

To summarise, the mediated character of the exercise of agency in the socio-historical process of the transformation of nature through labour relates to the satisfaction of socially developed individual needs. Thus, circulation of capital in the production, distribution and consumption processes relates to unsatisfied needs to the extent that the accumulation of capital rests on the dispossession of societies (Harvey, 2018a; 2018b), that the space-time variation of capital-neoliberalism (Jessop, 2014;

Peck, 2010; 2012a) contours the particularities of political and social arrangements determining the unequal distribution of resources.

To be sure, the lack of satisfaction of needs resulting from the material impossibility to access resources, the socialisation of people who can barely make ends meet as less worthy of respect, and the limited opportunities to realise agency characterise the experience of people in poverty. Thus, alienation in poverty stands as a theoretical apparatus to explain the interaction between the circulation of capital and the experiences of people in poverty through the vantage point of social policy, as the following two sections develop.

### **3.2. Human needs and agency**

This section advances a conceptualisation of needs and agency in their relation to the circulation of capital. It starts by critically contrasting preferences with needs as measures of social development. It then provides an operational definition of needs for the theory of alienation that is grounded in cultural factors and socio-historical developments (Maslow, 1954; Doyal and Gough, 1991; Geras, 1983) that condition their satisfaction. Afterwards it develops a notion of agency that encompasses the structural domains that contour its realisation. To that end, it builds on theories of critical agency (Harvey, 2014; 2018a; 2018b; Lister, 2004; 2010; 2018) and critical autonomy (Doyal and Gough, 1991) and advances it with an understanding of individual and collective agency. In particular, this section brings forward needs and agency as pillars for the development of the theory of alienation in poverty. Ultimately, this section sets the basis for a critical approach to human capital theories that have advanced a type of neoliberal subject (Chandler and Reid, 2016) that draws from narrowly understood needs – often conflating them with preferences – and a functionalist definition of agency currently encouraged by a neoliberal welfare system in the western world.

### *3.2.1. Measures of social development: preferences vs. needs*

Orthodox economic theorists have argued that because individuals are responsible for decisions about their own interests and preferences, the state should not interfere in those matters (Friedman, 1977). This is based on the notion that state intervention would unbalance alleged market self-regulation (Hayek, 1960). Furthermore, they have argued that because needs are socially and culturally determined, the real fulfilment of individual freedom takes place in the realm of choice. In other words, the capacity of individuals to make choices about their own needs and preferences is a reflection of a free society.

Accordingly, some authors have argued that individuals have the capacity to make plans that suit their needs and the means to achieve them. Therefore, certain mainstream economists have advanced the idea that the correct measure of distribution should be preferences as opposed to needs (Falk et al., 2018). This draws on the notion that the basis for people to evaluate their possibilities and concomitantly take responsibility for their actions is arguably their preferences concerning how best to satisfy needs and interests (Dieterlen, 2003). Furthermore, a number of others have conflated preferences and needs (Raus et al., 2012), and stated that as such, society should value them equally. This approach to preferences in contrast to needs is one of the key tenets behind the global trend of CCT that focus on human capital formation, as chapter two has discussed.

However, as analysed in what follows, the emphasis on preferences and human capital shifts the ethos of social policy from its once social responsibility to its current market-oriented endeavour. As expressed by Doyal and Gough, the displacement “*from needs to preferences fully justifies the control of market over politics*” (Doyal and Gough, 1991: 2). Furthermore, the focus on preferences over needs builds on the assumption of fully informed and rational individuals. Nevertheless, the literature has shown that individuals base decisions on limited information and rational thinking is seldom what drives those decisions (Villarespe, 2010). Effectively, this criticism paved the way for

the nuanced version of human choice that manifests in the World Development Report (WB, 2015), which chapter six further investigates.

The neoliberal focus on preferences over needs, or rather the framing of needs in relation to people's preferences, is functional to the circulation of capital. This is the case because in a situation where people are free to choose how best to satisfy their needs the alleged axiom of self-regulated supply and demand stands. Thus, people would have access to the goods, services and resources that fit those preferences.

This resonates with key assumptions behind *Prospera*, particularly because the purpose of CCT is to facilitate people's access to the distribution of those resources via an enhanced participation in the production process. In other words, for CCT programmes the formation of human capital by "*the extreme poor*" is the key to access the labour market so that they can satisfy their needs in whatever way they see best suits their preferences. To that end, people should decide to invest in their human capital and, provided they are self-reliant with regard to the completion of conditionalities the government will facilitate training and access to health and education.

Thus, the ethos of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico rests on a concept of freedom in relation to people's decisions about escaping poverty that entails investing in their human capital, deciding to work hard, and choosing how to satisfy their needs, as chapter five critically investigates. For CCT programmes such as *Prospera* preferences frame needs inasmuch as people are allegedly free to decide whether their needs remain unmet or whether they invest in their education and make proper use of their benefits to increase their income in the labour market.

This mainstream understanding of needs aligns with the market rationale as it predisposes welfare recipients to labour dynamics, as the findings chapters further investigate. The contradiction between this ethos of freedom and needs pushes a sense of powerlessness and reduced self-esteem onto beneficiaries of *Prospera*, as chapter six

analyses. Hence, framing needs from the vantage point of preferences is in contradiction to the lived experience of welfare recipients.

As opposed to mainstream understanding of preferences, a more robust approach understands them as an act of socially determined personal freedoms in which individuals choose among the options available to them (Maslow, 1954). Thus, the exercise of those preferences are a reflection of desires and as such, they can be and often are at odds with the needs of other people. Accordingly, “*desires based on ignorance are epistemologically irrational*” (Doyal and Gough, 1991: 15).

Furthermore, also opposed to mainstream understanding of needs, the concept of subsistence<sup>64</sup> needs refers at the least to everything that is essential for surviving (Neef et al., 1991), whereas preferences are an act of personal freedom in which individuals choose among the options available to them (Maslow, 1954). Understood this way, unsatisfied subsistence needs and lack of resources concomitant with poverty determines the exercise of personal preferences. That is to say, when socially available resources are not under people’s control, as chapter five investigates, needs go unsatisfied and preferences are sidelined.

Research interviewees faced this tension daily in rural areas when their food “*choices*” were limited to home grown products as a result of being unable to afford commodified products and in urban areas when their education “*choices*” were limited to a single under resourced school. Thus, preferences as measures of wellbeing are but a proxy of an idealised living standard that does not represent the lived experience of people in poverty, in fact romanticising it, and these measures reproduce the “*deservingness*” logic that chapters six and seven further investigate.

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<sup>64</sup> The relevance of Maslow’s hierarchy rests on establishing a line under which human subsistence is impossible, for which he developed the concept of basic needs (Maslow, 1954). Notwithstanding, the contradictions of his proposition become evident when elaborating a list of needs while at the same time theorising the socio-culturally determined character of needs. Thus, for analytical and clarification purposes, this thesis refers to subsistence needs as it strikes a chord with the lived experience of research interviewees.



Historically, the satisfaction of needs occurred through the natural powers of humans who live in society, thus producing socially the conditions for their subsistence and reproduction. Accordingly, this production process created new needs and powers by means of transforming nature, making what Marx called an “*anthropological nature*” (Marx, 1988; Mészáros, 1970; 2010). However, in capitalist societies the satisfaction of needs occurs by and through the circulation of capital. That is to say, the different moments of capital (Harvey, 2014; Marx, 1990) contour the form and extent to which individuals satisfy those needs. In particular, the production, distribution and circulation of global capital set the material grounds under which societies thereof access and distribute goods and services for the satisfaction of people’s needs.

According to some authors, the satisfaction of human fundamental needs renders human flourishing possible and as such, the resources available for their satisfaction is a better measure of social development (Neef et al., 1991). This insight into the limitation and potential of needs provides a key starting point to understanding needs. Nevertheless, this biologically grounded definition of needs prevents an understanding of their socio-historical content. In fact, needs ceased being biological needs through the mediated character of labour, and thereby transcended to needs inserted into the socio-historical process (Maslow, 1954). Therefore, people are not merely dependent on biological needs (and nature) but are then socio-historical beings that have transcended and appropriated nature through the processes of production.

This step is key in the conceptualisation of poverty. On the one hand, the realisation (satisfaction) of needs is a condition for the formation and development of society. On the other, such realisation of needs occurs socially, that is an individual’s satisfaction of needs occurs at a given time and place, and cannot occur in isolation. Thus, the **definition of needs**, as opposed to being biologically defined, transmutes into **socially developed needs through and by the production process and thus, their satisfaction occurs socially**.

Concomitantly, the accumulation of unsatisfied needs by a certain number of people in society is a reflection of the extent of poverty. For research interviewees, the (non)satisfaction of needs reflects the social dynamics of inequality that determine the access to resources. That is to say, their needs and potential satisfaction of needs correspond to the political, economic and social arrangements prevalent in a particular place and time.

This is critical vis-à-vis mainstream definitions of needs that are based on the bare minimum for subsistence used to define the line of poverty. A particular example is the \$1.90 a day threshold of poverty advanced by the World Bank (WB, 2014), which builds on a narrowly defined threshold of poverty that rests on pairing a minimum expenditure with satisfaction of basic needs. This measure is problematic as it displaces from the centre stage of analysis the complex dynamics that characterise poverty, and replaces them by income.

In fact, the prevalence of income as the single most important measure of poverty (WB, 2014) strengthens the idea that access to work equals exiting poverty. That is to say, that self-reliance, hard work and resilience inside and outside the labour market are the path to social mobility. However, the life trajectories of research interviewees in fact contradicts this proposition, as chapters five, six and seven further investigate.

Hence, the importance of conceptualising needs with regard to the experiences of people in poverty. To that end, as previously mentioned, it is essential to understand the socio-historical content of those needs. Accordingly, they are a result of the mediated character of labour and thus, are constitutive of the transformation of nature into object of our action (Boltvinik, 2005b). This is *not* to say, however, that needs are the only determinants of human action. Rather, that **needs and the satisfaction thereof, are reflections of human development inasmuch as the production process humanly required to achieve a state of individually satisfied needs socially, is at the same time a result of a socio-historical process.** That is to say,

people's needs and people's satisfaction of their needs occur through access to goods and services that correspond to the type of production prevalent at a given time and place. Thus, within capitalism, the circulation of capital contours the potential of needs as well as the means and forms through which people can satisfy those needs.

Such conceptualisation allows us to account for the set of norms, socially shared values, and identities as well as people's impulses, drivers and interests in their decision-making. However, it puts centre stage needs as a "*theoretical abstract*"<sup>65</sup> in order to develop a theory of alienation applied to poverty, which is the purpose of this chapter. Thus, if at the very basic level the limited satisfaction of needs due to lack of resources reflects the content of poverty, then needs hold a contradictory element within them. **While the dissatisfaction of (subsistence) needs precludes the exercise of agency, their satisfaction enables it.**

This step is crucial in the development of a concept of agency with regard to a life in poverty, as analysed in what follows. Furthermore, this conceptualisation departs from approaches to needs based on "*epistemologically hegemonic*" discourses that infantilise people in poverty by arguing that "*non-poor people*" are better equipped to decide what their needs and those of "*the poor*" are (Maslow, 1954; Boltvinik, 2005b). Additionally, understanding needs from their socio-historical content vis-à-vis the process of production avoids defining the satisfaction of needs in terms of healthy or unhealthy people (Maslow, 1954), which oversimplifies the difficulties of people experiencing poverty. Finally, the conceptualisation of needs in this thesis mirrors the experience of research interviewees in both urban and rural areas who struggle to navigate poverty, provide for their households and deal with a social welfare regime that rests on a "*deservingness*" rationale at odds with their living conditions, as the findings chapters analyse. Thus, needs as a "*theoretical abstract*" paves the way for a

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<sup>65</sup> This thesis borrows the term "*theoretical abstract*" from Marx who uses it to emphasise concepts with depth theoretical meaning that illuminate complex social dynamics (Marx, 1990; Ollman, 2003).

conceptualisation of agency with an emphasis on people in poverty, as analysed in what follows.

### 3.2.2. Agency

Welfare research has traditionally concentrated on the structural constraints that determine the needs and problems of people. This liberal approach to agency has focused on the unidimensional nature of people and their analysis of agency has been in relation to people's reception of welfare benefits (Titterton, 2005). Thus, their emphasis is on a welfare approach to agency, wherein the *"welfare subject is invariably construed within a deficit model, as lacking these enlightenment traits: as dependent, unpredictable, unable to act in their own best interests, lacking agency."* (Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 439). The welfare approach to agency is thus not concerned with the experiences of domination or exclusion, but on distribution of goods and services.

What is more, such an approach to people's agency has ultimately paved the way for professional expert analysis of poverty, wherein there is no place for people's voices and experiences of poverty (Lister, 2004: 44); the use of prescriptive standards of living is based on researchers' own understanding of how people in poverty should be able to live (Veit-Wilson, 1986). In other words, *"individuals and their needs were understood passively within categories of researchers', providers', policy-makers' own making (socio-economic groups, children at risk, disabled, old, etc.)"* (Williams et al., 1999: 9). This limited understanding of agency neglects the differentiated character of people's vulnerability to the dynamics of capital as well as individual responses to structural constraints that risk patronising and understanding people in poverty as dependant, incapable and defenceless.

The response to that was to focus on *"placing emotional life at the heart of social policy and welfare practice"* (Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 438). This *"new left"* movement emphasised the relational aspect of agency and highlighted that emotions and rationality are not opposed but interrelated concepts (Ahmed, 2014; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005). Termed a *"psychosocial paradigm"* (Frost and Hoggett, 2008), it

approached agency as emotionally driven, with an external existence but internally defined through language. Accordingly, individuals are social subjects with agency *“though not necessarily in a position to exercise this reflexively”* (Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 440) due to power relations and status hierarchies.

Largely drawing from psychoanalysis, such an approach analyses agency mainly from the psychological standpoint that risks overemphasising the role of therapy in resolving *“deficits”* of agency. Furthermore, it understands the agent-structure relationship in instrumentalist terms, inasmuch as their interest lies on the process through which people’s identities (new social movements) and voices (disability movements) articulate at the level of policy provision. In fact, such an approach has heavily informed welfare analysis and CCT in particular (Skoufias and Parker, 2001), paving the way for an activation of agency logic that resonates with neoliberalism, which chapter five further investigates.

Objective accounts of agency have gained momentum particularly with the influence of sociological Darwinism. Accordingly, they approach agency as if *“the behaviour and social position of individuals are directly and primarily attributable to the biological inheritance of certain traits and characteristics”* (Holman, 1978: 55). This essentialist approach reduces agency to *“biological and genetic factors or to a fixed “human nature”, which is impervious to social or cultural influences”* (Ferguson et al., 2002: 98). Thus, power, oppression, inequality and poverty are the result of the unchanging natural characteristics of a group of individuals that suffer domination precisely because of their own nature. That is to say, *“the intelligent move up into the upper class. Overall, those who inherit high IQs will be successful in terms of prestige and earnings, those endowed with low intelligence will receive low pay or be unemployed, they will be the poor”* (Holman, 1978: 57). Therefore, the cycle of poverty is due to intermarriage among the lower class, which perpetuates low intelligence (Hernstein and Murray, 1996).

That approach has served to maintain the *status quo* and to provide a short cut explanation for the “*ultra-rich*” to explain their privilege. Notwithstanding, the political implications of this approach are worrisome, as in the case of former Under-Secretary of State for the UK’s Department of Education and Science, Rhodes Boyson, who agreed that the result of education was “*a shrinking of the gene pool of natural ability within the working class*” (Holman, 1978: 58).

Drawing also from a positivistic understanding of reality, a school of thought known as “*the free market individual*”, which emphasised the role of individuals in the economy (Holman, 1978), has had lasting effects on welfare. The rational and new-rational choice theory have been the main advocates of this approach. Accordingly, individuals exercise agency inasmuch they are able to use available information to maximise benefits and reduce cost in order to undertake their preferences (Becker, 1993). Concepts of bounded rationality (Herbert, 1999) which accounts for cost of information, and partial rationality and ecological rationality (Smith, 2003), which highlight the relevance of context in the decision-making process, aimed to target its longstanding critics.

Another, more recent approach to agency derived from a critique of original rational choice theory has evolved from several disciplines such as psychology, behavioural economics, neuroscience, political and cognitive sciences. Their core goal has been to understand human processes of mind and the influence of society in order to develop “*interventions that target human choice and action (behaviour)*” (WB, 2015: 2). Ultimately, this theoretical approach aims to influence policymaking and alter welfare provision. Accordingly, the kind of interventions it envisages are “*changing the timing of cash transfers, labelling something differently, simplifying the steps for service take-up, offering reminders, activating a talent social norm, or reducing the salience of a stigmatized identity*” (WB, 2015: 3). As chapter one discussed, this global trend frames agency from the stand point of an alleged free market and as such, it aims to alter people’s agency to make it entrepreneurial, resilient, self-reliant and in sum more functional to market dynamics.

Despite the different trends within this positivistic school of thought, what they all have in common is their understanding of agency as *“primarily motivated by individual, economic self-interest”* and it follows that: *“a person’s income or wealth reflects his economic worth. Thus man is seen as economic man to such an extent that society should be organised mainly around this facet of his nature”* (Holman, 1978: 69). This has perpetuated a discourse of *“deservingness”* and pushed for more interventions such as CCT programmes that alienate people in poverty from their resources, as chapter four investigates.

Particularly in the case of the renovated account of rational choice, the focus is on the design and implementation of poverty alleviation policies in order to shape human behaviour. Accordingly, only *“free men”* acting on a *“free market”* are in control of their lives. In the words of one of the leading scholars of this trend, Milton Friedman, people are *“responsible for their own destinies”* (Friedman, 1977). Under such conditions, people are held accountable for their actions and conditions.

The limitations of these understandings of agency are vast. Accordingly, *“the well-known limitations of rational-actor theory, its static quality, its logical antinomies, its vulnerability to arguments of infinite regress, its failure to develop a progressive concrete research programme, can all be traced to its starting point”* (Foley, 2004: 9). Furthermore, these theories have been catalysts of *“deserving”* and *“undeserving poor”* discourses. Namely, they are powerful political tools to request welfare cuts on the basis of people’s *“unfitness”* to exit poverty, scroungers taking advantage of an all *“too naive welfare system”*, *“troubled families”* who are *“unwilling”* or *“incapable”* of raising their children properly, and in short a group of *“underclass”* people who refuse to keep up with what a *“healthy”* society requires.

Largely evolved as a counterweight to those approaches, early feminist movements led the discussion about empowerment. Accordingly, empowerment related to *“the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.”* (Kabeer, 1999: 435). However, as in the case of the

post-liberal account of agency, empowerment theories are instrumentalist. The main drawback of this is that *“the success of instrumentalism has also had costs. It has required the translation of feminist insights into the discourse of policy, a process in which some of the original political edge of feminism has been lost. Quantification is one aspect of this process of translation.”* (Kabeer, 1999: 436). Thus, by trying to adapt empowerment to cost-benefit calculus, usually present in policy debates, they have diminished the understanding of agency. Furthermore, by looking at it through the decision-making lens, they are not capable of understanding the full range of relations, experiences, constraints and manifestations of individual agency socially.

As a response to those critics, other feminists advanced the understanding of empowerment theories. Their argument is that it is not only choice that we need to analyse but the extent to which choices have an impact on our lives. Accordingly, some choices are more relevant than others are, that is to say, acquiring the ability to make strategic (first order) choices where previously denied (Kabeer, 1999). The main contribution of this approach to agency has been to highlight the positive and negative aspect of agency: *“power to”* and *“power over”*, whereby *“power to”* refers to people’s capacity to define their own lives and life-choices, whereas *“power over”* refers to the diminishing or obliteration of someone else’s agency through violence or coercion. Disempowerment thus refers to the impairment of exercising choice due to external constraints.

The relevance of this theory for women’s empowerment notwithstanding, it has important limitations. In particular, it is not able to account for the organisation of minority groups that use the *“politics of particularism leading to intergroup rivalry rather than solidarity. In these circumstances ‘second order agency’, that is agency which brings about a change of pattern in the life of an individual or group, becomes increasingly difficult to achieve, hence the inappropriateness of the rhetoric of empowerment and choice.”* (Frost and Hoggett, 2008: 441). Furthermore, its understanding of agency fails to recognise the relationship between personal circumstances such as depression, tiredness and lack of motivation, with structural constraints such as lack of fulfilling



work, discrimination, shame and stigma. Therefore, although a powerful tool claiming for emancipation, theories of empowerment and in particular feminist theories are insufficient to account for and explain experiences of poverty.

**Table 10: Approaches to agency in the literature**

School of thought	Approaches	Focus and main tenets	Limitations
Liberal	Welfare	Focuses on structural constraints. Expert-led and prescriptive standards of living.	Unidimensional approach to people Deficit model of welfare recipients Downplays power relations (domination, exclusion). Patronise people in receipt of welfare benefits.
Post-liberal - new left movement	New left movement / psychosocial paradigm / new social movements / disability movements	Relational aspect of agency. Understands emotions and rationality as interrelated. Understands individuals as social subjects with individual agency. Takes into account power relations social stratification by class. Focuses on an activation of agency logic.	Overemphasises psychological approaches. Focuses on “deficits” of agency. Instrumentalist understanding of agent-infrastructure interaction.
Positivist	Sociological Darwinism / free-market individual / rational and new rationale choice theory / behavioural economics, neuroscience, political and cognitive sciences	Biological treats. Inheritance of qualities. Social mobility because of inheritance of better-equipped genes. Bounded rationality. Ecological rationality.	Essentialist understanding of agency. Disregards social and cultural factors. Poverty inherited – marriage among lower classes. Individuals mainly motivated by economic self-interest. Perpetuates “deservingness” discourse.
Feminist	Critical theories	Empowerment/ disempowerment. Focuses on strategic decisions. Captures implications of shame and stigma. Focus on “power to” and “power over”.	Decision-making less lessened its scope of agency. Downplays the politics of particularism. Unable to link internalisation of disempowerment to structural dynamics.

Overall, what is missing in the literature (Table 10) has been an understanding of humans as active and creative but at the same time constrained by social and material forces that surround them, of the sort provided by the post-liberal account of agency. However, that transcends its setbacks of overemphasising the psychosocial aspect, particularly of a life in poverty and the welfare subject understanding of agency. Furthermore, there is a need to analyse power relations, identity and vulnerability as in the case of feminists' approach to empowerment but avoiding the limitations of instrumentalism. Particularly important is accounting for the relationship between structure and agency, power and powerlessness

### *3.2.3. Redefining needs and agency*

Despite the several strands that have tried to conceptualise agency in social sciences, what is missing is *"the middle-range concepts which can tie these concerns to the structural contexts of widespread poverty, inequality, globalization and the international restructuring welfare"* (Williams et al., 1999: 10). According to some authors (Doyal and Gough, 1991), the most advanced level of agency is critical autonomy, which refers to critical reflection of social norms. That is to say, individual autonomy *"in relation to the environment and the conditions for the deployment of human interiority of the real individuality"* (Boltvinik, 2005b: 53).

Thus understood, a first step in the development of the *"theoretical abstract"* of agency is defining it in relation to the process of appropriation of accumulated knowledge of previous and current generations in relation with the socio-historical environment. However, one of the longstanding critiques of historical materialism is that it lacks understanding of how that process and others take place within classes and what that entails for gender and ethnicity (Barbe, 2008). That is to say, the social realm that Marx is referring to arguably prevents us from analysing the fact that patriarchal dominant discourses characterise socialisation within the capitalist mode of production. Accordingly, it approaches sexuality as a mere act of social and human production and reproduction (Heller, 1978).

Nevertheless, a critical appraisal of the circulation of capital in capitalist societies allows the definition of agency beyond those criticisms. In fact, analysing capitalism entails a recognition of the formal and real subsumptions that exist within capitalist rule. There, *“the multiplicities of capitalist rule... [account for] the varied forms that capitalist exploitation takes place in a wide field of domination (which includes axes of race and gender in addition to and in conjunction with varied forms of waged and unwaged labour) [that] poses the need to articulate a range of existing struggles that challenge capitalist rule in different ways.”* (Hardt and Negri, 2018: 441).

This emphasises *“the capacity of people to be creative, reflexive human beings (...) to be active agents in shaping their lives, experiencing, acting upon and reconstituting the outcomes of welfare policies in various ways”* (Williams et al., 1999: 2). In other words, a critical realist approach to the structure-agency dichotomy permits *“a specification of how structural and cultural power impinge upon agents, and how agents use their own personal powers to act “so rather than otherwise”, in such situations”*. (Archer, 2003: 3). This would entail understanding the specific *“internal conversation”* through which people in poverty *“respond to social forms”* (Archer, 2003: 6) and as such underpinning the *“personal power that enables us to be the authors of our own projects in society”* (Archer, 2003: 34).

An approximation of this sort will allow transcending modernist and postmodernist tendency to *“dissolve the human being into discursive structures and humankind into a disembodied textualism”* (Archer, 2000: 2). That is recognising agency as a pre-condition of individual activity for which *“we cannot be ontologically undermined”* (Archer, 2002: 2). As such, if as critical realist argue *“our continuous sense of self is... ontologically inviolable, (and) our personal and social identities are epistemologically vulnerable”* (Archer, 2000: 2), then the activation of structural forces to enable or constrain the realization of agency is contingent upon individuals capacity to formulate and undertake projects. This assertion permits accounting for an interaction between a theory of alienation and the critical agency of people in poverty. Particularly, that the realisation of **critical agency means the individual power**

**socially to exercise control over the political, economic and social conditions of everyday life.** Thus, individual and social (“*oneself*” and the “*social-self*”) are inextricably linked.

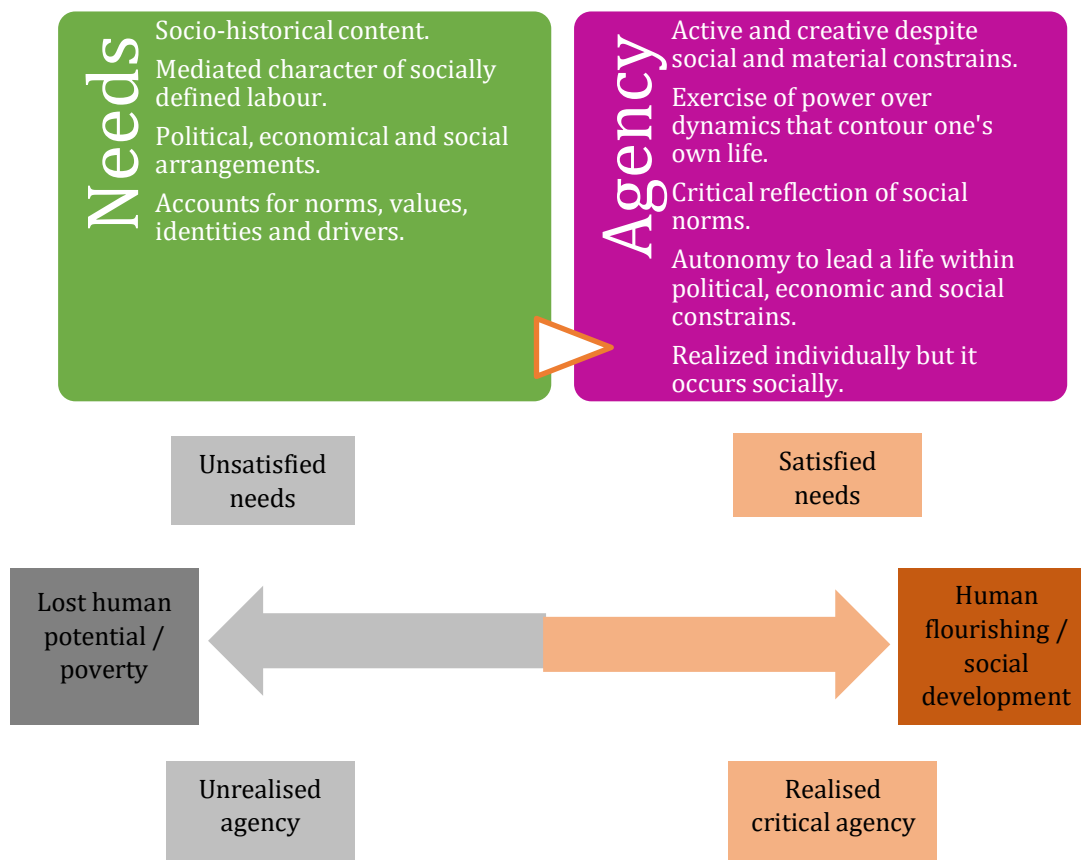
Furthermore, and as opposed to normative prescriptions of agency (as in the case of CCT), **the social nurturing of critical individual agency refers to the process through which the ensemble of social relations manifest, transform and potentiate agency.** Concomitantly, the multiplicities that occur within capitalist societies (Hardt and Negri, 2018) entail that the different forms that capitalist exploitation takes, alienate people in poverty from themselves, their social-self and from their resources, as theorised in the following section and analysed in the findings chapters.

That is to say, the non-realisation of (critical) agency by members of society because of unsatisfied (subsistence) needs is a reflection of inaccessible and unequally distributed resources. Hence, the realisation of capital that takes place in the exchange process (Marx, 1990; Harvey, 2003; 2014; 2018a; 2018b) conditions the exercise of agency inasmuch as the satisfaction of needs depends on access to resources that correspond to the current mode of production. Given that the satisfaction of needs is a prerequisite for the realisation of agency, the potential exercise of critical agency by people in poverty would then mirror the potential development of a society.

This step is key to transcending approaches to poverty that silence power relations and downplay the structural dynamics. Furthermore, it allows to expose the burdens of poverty as well as the power distribution that occurs at a household level. Accordingly, a definition of agency that derives from a critical understanding of capitalist societies entails approaching it as the power of individuals to control the dynamics that contour their everyday lives. Thus, the realisation of agency relates to power and autonomy and is fundamental for a person’s self-esteem and self-identity. Therefore, people in poverty exercise their agency at an individual level through the interaction at the social level. The contradictory nature of both agency and needs

previously referred to, present as two core constitutive elements of human action and are particularly relevant in poverty, as the following section analyses.

**Chart 2:** Main tenets of a critical approach to needs and agency



To summarise (Chart 2), the development of individual potentialities occurs in the subject-object relationship mediated by the realisation of needs and agency with regard to socio-historical processes. Therefore, the transformation and expansion of human needs and agency takes place in the social realm. The aggregated satisfaction of socially determined needs that enable the realisation of the ensemble of individual critical agencies socially marks the potential of human flourishing and social development. In contrast, the aggregation of dissatisfied needs that prevent the exercise of agency signals the prevalence of poverty and a loss of human potential. This step is crucial to conceptualise the satisfaction of needs within capitalist societies and its concomitant exercise of agency as previously theorised. Notwithstanding, in its

relation with people in poverty, the circulation of capital within the neoliberal paradigm entails a process of alienation, as the following sections analyse.

### **3.3. Alienation**

This section presents a renewed understanding of alienation by applying it to poverty. It develops a conceptual approach to the dynamics between the material hardships and the relational/symbolic experiences of poverty. Thus, it draws from a critical reassertion of Marxist approaches that would set the basis for reinterpreting conditional cash transfer programmes and ultimately contest and expose dynamics of government exploitation in the form of welfare provision. Therefore, by building the conceptual mechanisms through which alienation takes place, it sets the ground for the exposition of the contradictions posed by *Prospera* regarding the life trajectories of its welfare recipients that the findings chapters analyse. The first part develops the relationship between a theory of use-value and alienation in order to illuminate the contradictions between hard work and the production process. The second part develops the content and mechanism of alienation from socially available resources that people in poverty experience. In particular, it explains the functioning of the geographically unequal distribution of resources that entails a dissatisfaction of needs and unrealised critical agency and that people in poverty experience in the form of powerlessness and assault on their dignity. The third part develops the content of alienation from oneself of people in poverty. To that end it explains the mechanism of a materially grounded idea of “*success*” that is functional for the circulation of capital and reduces the self-esteem and power of people in poverty to lead lives of their own choosing. The fourth part develops the content of alienation from others of people in poverty. To that end it explains the mechanism of material and symbolic construing of poverty that reduces social cohesion via “*othering*”, shaming and symbolic violence that people experience in the form of humiliation and disrespect.

### 3.3.1. Alienation and a theory of use-value.

As previously discussed, the satisfaction of needs corresponds with socio-historical developments and takes place within specific modes of production. Furthermore, the distribution of resources and of opportunities within a given time and place constrains the realisation of agency. Thus, the satisfaction of needs and realisation of critical agency relate to people's control over the material conditions that contour their everyday lives. This step is key in the construction of a theory that accounts for the material hardships and explains the lived experience of poverty. The theory of alienation applied to poverty brings these two dialectical processes together by analysing the dynamics of capital through the lens of people's life-trajectories.

To that end, this thesis draws from the approach to dialectics developed by Friedrich Hegel (Hegel, 2002), amended by Karl Marx (Marx, 1904; 1959), contextualised by David Harvey (Harvey, 2018a; 2018b) and clarified by Bertell Ollman (Ollman, 2003). Accordingly, **dialectics is a method of inquiry and organising and expounding findings that focuses on internal relations and contradictions of social dynamics. Thus, the dialectical method involves two steps.** This first step is **the philosophy of internal relations that approaches things as relations focusing on the interdependence of units of analysis (abstracts) in relation to their space and time connections.** Accordingly, the philosophy of internal relations means that *“the interconnections between things include their ties to their own preconditions and future possibilities as well as to whatever is affecting them (and whatever they are affecting) right now”* (Ollman, 1996: 4).

The second step is the **process of abstraction that is the establishment of boundaries to the philosophy of internal relations.** Thus, abstraction refers to *“a particular organization of elements in the real world—having to do with the functioning of capitalism—that provides the objective underpinnings for most of the ideological abstractions”* (Ollman, 2003: 62).

The two step process of dialectics entails that *“in our thought [the concrete]... appears as a process of synthesis, as a result and not as a starting point and, therefore, also the starting point of observation and conception.... the abstract definitions lead to the reproduction of the concrete subject in the course of reasoning... the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete is but a way of thinking by which the concrete is grasped and is reproduced in our mind as a concrete. It is by no means, however, the process which itself generates the concrete...”* (Marx, 1904: 293-294). Thus, *“the real concrete”* refers to the world in its entirety and complexity. The *“thought concrete”* refers to the reconstruction of the world. Passing from one to the other via the process of abstraction is the road to understanding reality (Ollman, 2003: 60). This ontological position through the philosophy of internal relations and abstractions permits us to account for the real world [epistemology] through dialectics as a method of inquiry and exposition that will be essential in the development of this thesis.

By using the philosophy of internal relations and the process of abstraction, dialectics allows us to transcend the current trend that privileges the analysis of things as separate and independent from each other. Thus, the dialectical method emerges as an advantageous and necessary tool for understanding the contradictions of welfare provision through the lived experiences of poverty. Furthermore, it permits us to counter reductionist methods of defining complex social dynamics merely in terms of cause and effect.

The conditions of material deprivation referred to by the multidimensional definition of poverty in Mexico previously discussed, are in fact more than just mere inaccessible products, infrastructure, goods and services. Those conditions are a by-product of a productive system that rests on accumulating capital through the extraction of labour time in the production process and dispossession of societies (Harvey, 2018a; 2018b). Therefore, it is key to develop the theory of use-value of products in the production process and its concomitant extraction of surplus value via the socially necessary labour time that is reflected in the exchange-value of



commodities with regard to the distribution and access to resources by people (Chart 3).

As demonstrated by Marx (Marx, 1971; Marx 1990) commodities differ in their use-value (their physical form) while equate in their value form (representation of their value on the market), as expressions of required social time to produce them. Thus, the products of social labour when exchanged for their use-value bring into focus their actual value and this exchange-value takes a form in the commodity realm of money commodity. Accordingly, socially produced commodities are available through the exchange process in the market. This means that the exchange of commodities entails the realisation of the moment within the circulation of capital referred to as consumption.

As such, the exchange of commodities is a pre-condition for the realisation of labour wherein products of labour acquire value through the social time necessary for their production, and such value is realised in relation to other commodities, namely in the process of exchange (Marx, 1990). Then, realisation of labour takes place in the process of exchanging commodities, which are in turn confirmations of human needs inasmuch as those products of labour are reflections of socially developed needs produced for their satisfaction. However, what determines the magnitude of such value is the “*amount of labour socially necessary*” (Marx, 1990: 129) to produce them. This again is a key step, given that, as will become clear in what follows, realisation of human labour (i.e. actively partaking in the consumption process) does not equate with realisation of needs, as some key economists (Friedman, 1977) and policy makers (Meade, 2016) have argued.

**Chart 3:** A theory of use-value in the circulation of capital.



alienation becomes nothing more than a personal reaction to the constraints of reality (Husserl, 1970) or the psychological feeling of being alone (Seeman, 1959). The myriad of misunderstandings about the circulation of capital and misuse of dialectics in the literature have driven some authors to wrongly call for concepts such as relative deprivation or marginalisation to substitute alienation (Gangas, 2014), because the concept of alienation allegedly strips agency out of the equation and has been used vaguely and without any theoretical and practical precision (McClung, 1972).

These problematic representations of alienation have been also a result of structural Marxism that declared the existence of an epistemological separation in Marx's thought from his early writings and the more developed later ones (Althusser, 1969). Accordingly, the early "*humanism*" of Marx is nothing but "*a neo-Hegelian juvenilia... which was superseded by the more scientific approach of the older Marx*" (Ferguson et al., 2002: 80). Supporters of this approach have abandoned Marxism and focused on some type of post-Marxism or post-structuralism (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987) to understand society.

Nevertheless, several authors have already shown the absence of an epistemological break in Marx thought (Fuchs, 2018; Harvey, 2018a; 2018b; Nicolaus, 1968; Walton et al., 1970; Zhang, 2013). In fact, the analysis of the material conditions of capitalism is a recognition that objective conditions have subjective consequences (Zhang, 2011). That is to say, the material alienation concomitant with the circulation of capital evident in *Das Capital* (Marx, 1990), manifests subjectively and symbolically on people's negotiation of their everyday lives that is the focus of the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of Marx (Marx, 1904). This dialectical objective-subjective relation is in fact a clear theoretical thread in the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1993). This is the starting point for the development of a theory of alienation applied to a life in poverty, which this section develops.

### *3.3.2. Alienation from socially available resources and opportunities*

The general alienation characteristic of capitalist exploitation is one *"in which humans are not in control of the structures that affect their everyday lives"* (Harvey, 2018: 456). For people who experience poverty as a phenomenon that encompasses their day to day, this relates to the dissatisfied needs and unrealised potential of agency concomitant with unequally distributed resources and unavailable opportunities. To explain these dynamics, this thesis develops three layers of alienation. These three layers refer to material and immaterial resources, people's dealings with themselves and their interaction with others. Particularly relevant for this thesis is how the reduced and often complete loss of control over the material and symbolic conditions that characterise people's experience of poverty clash with the growing control from CCT programmes that in turn reproduce the dynamics of capital exploitation, as analysed in chapters five, six and seven.

The spatiotemporal arrangements in society and the dynamics of circulation of capital are key determinants of the prices of goods and services. As such, to explain poverty it is essential to unpack how those general dynamics relate with micro dynamics and in particular, the micro-management of resources at household level. As previously suggested, the price of commodities does not depend on the amount of labour (effort) put in to produce them but on the exchange value set in the circulation of capital that to a large extent relates to the socially necessary labour time to produce such commodity. This contradiction between labour and socially necessary labour time beneath commodity production is at the centre of yet another contradiction, which fuels alienation from oneself in a life in poverty: That the effort and hard work deployed by people (both within and outside the production process) does not directly amount to accessing resources and opportunities.

That is to say, the payment offered for the product of labour does not depend on personal effort or hard work, but on the dynamics of capital circulation. Furthermore, the individual labour spent to produce a commodity does not equate to

the price of the commodity to such an extent that the payment for individual effort at work to produce a particular commodity often does not amount to the income required to purchase that same commodity. Thus, the value of a product realises in the exchange process insofar as it is congealed social labour time although the compensation for individual hard work and effort (individual labour time) is not in the measure necessary to access commodities or satisfy needs.

Given that the realisation of labour takes place within the commodity and in turn, the realisation of use-value of a commodity takes place in the consumption process (Harvey, 2014: 36), then commodities represent a product of social labour that constitutes both the productive activity and human activity. However, the realisation of labour does not always result in a commodity, as in the case of self-consumption. In such case, the utility of the product of labour rests on directly satisfying a need. That is in essence what use-value refers to (Marx, 1971) in its pristine form. This utility however, does not equate with value, for value (in its money form) presents where social labour manifests (i.e. a commodity). Thus, individual labour adding value occurs through the productive process of human labour and is realised in the final form of the circulation of capital that is consumption.

This is a key step because the realisation of agency (and its precondition, the satisfaction of needs), does not necessarily occur through and by the production process as is the case with nurturing meaningful social relations, fighting for justice or devoting leisure time to activities of one's own choosing. Notwithstanding, when individual labour is not realised in any commodity (either through the exchange of the product of labour for another commodity or the direct exchange of labour for the commodity money) it is left then with a product of utility but without value (in its money form) in the exchange process. Under such conditions, the reduced possibility to access goods and services relates to the impossibility of generating value through labour. This was the case for research interviewees in rural areas who relied on self-consumption and a subsistence economy or in urban areas where interviewees relied

on relatives' and neighbours' support to get free food and free childcare<sup>66</sup>. However, in those cases people's chances of accessing better products was also hindered because of the urban-rural divide. Accordingly, the micro management of resources in local areas reflects the dynamics of the circulation of capital inasmuch as they mirror the inequalities in society, as the findings chapters analyse.

People use commodities for different purposes, from food to clothing and sending children to school, all those individual needs universal across society. Thus, it is possible to subsume the purpose of a commodity as a confirmation of needs inasmuch as commodities embody the historical labour used to produce them. In turn, such labour is a representation of human needs created and transformed by it while those needs are at the same time creators and transformers of productive human activity. This dialectical relation is at the heart of people's experience of poverty, as analysed in what follows.

As previously indicated, the circulation of capital contours the realisation of needs and agency. Therefore, the contradiction between individual labour and socially necessary labour time behind the production process that frame the value (in its money form) of commodities and wages is at the core of alienation in poverty. Accordingly, people deploy effort and hard work in the production process (labour) and reproduction of society (non-commodified activities at home and at community level) for the satisfaction of needs. Notwithstanding, the distribution process (another key moment of the circulation of capital) of resources, goods, services and infrastructure differs within same regions and between urban and rural areas, which reflects the space time variations of capitalist neoliberalism (Peck, 2012). This geographically located

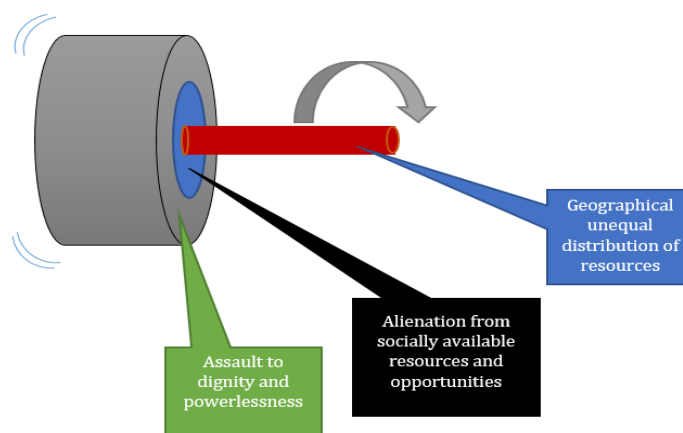
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<sup>66</sup> Households and communities trade time as self-help initiatives that reflect the ascendance of complementary currency systems (Gregory, 2015). Nevertheless, these initiatives are contradictory and ultimately show the extent of unsatisfied needs and unrealised critical agency. While from the vantage point of individuals trading time is a reflection of the deployment of agency to survive the burdens of capitalism, from the vantage point of society, they reflect the impossibility of a large number of people to generate value (in its money form) through labour.

unequal distribution of resources puts in motion the alienation of people in poverty from resources and opportunities.

To be sure, people's reduced and loss of control over the material conditions that structure and contour the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency define alienation in poverty. That is to say, **alienation of socially available resources and opportunities is the material impossibility to effectively decide about, have control over the access to, and use the goods, services, resources and opportunities for the satisfaction of needs.** Concomitantly, **such alienation that ultimately entails unsatisfied needs despite hard work and effort reduces the agency of people in poverty. Thus, the non-satisfaction of socially developed needs and unrealised critical agency due to the geographically unequal distribution of resources forces powerlessness onto people and assaults their dignity** (Chart 4).

**Chart 4:** The motion of alienation from socially available resources and opportunities



Accordingly, *"alienation not just entails capital's exploitation of labour, but also the realms of realisation, distribution and consumption, which means it extends to phenomena such as unemployment, consumerism, land seizure, deindustrilisation, debt peonage, financial scams, unaffordable housing, high food prices..."* (Fuchs, 2018: 456). The material separation from resources to satisfy basic needs that constitutes a life in

poverty is at the core of the disruption of the *"self"*, the *"social-being"* and ultimately a disruption of society understood as the historical conditions of what individuals are socially. As such, alienation from socially available resources and opportunities from the vantage point of individuals entails unequal power relations that contour the conditions limiting their control over social structures, products of labour and objects of human activity. Similarly, from the vantage point of society, such alienation entails the unequal distribution of resources that characterise capitalist exploitation. This, coupled with a neoliberal regime that pushes a particular type of agency aligned with a market rationale and a welfare provision that rests on surveillance of behaviour, further alienates people from their resources and opportunities in a contradictory way that manifests in the urban-rural divide.

### *3.3.3. Alienation from oneself*

The personal struggles concomitant with unsatisfied needs due to deprivation and lack of access to resources and opportunities signify the alienation at an individual level. It occurs as a result of the contradiction between hard work and the circulation of capital - more specifically, via a measure of *"success"* in terms of material living conditions that disrupts the *"self"* of people in poverty. Such an approach to success is at odds with people's experiences of poverty because despite their hard work, efforts and sacrifices to improve their living conditions and provide for their households, people cannot escape poverty. Thus, the logic of successful individuals in capitalist terms alienates people from their *"self"*.

The *"success-failure"* logic grounded in material living conditions measures people's abilities, knowledge, skills and ultimately suitability to be valuable members in society largely based on consumption patterns. This logic is functional to the circulation of capital as it calls for an activation logic of people in the labour market (production process) to then participate in the exchange of commodities (consumption process). Thus, the pervasiveness of this logic particularly under capitalist neoliberalism has become part and parcel of the dynamics of capital.



Success is then a variable of the market that is largely dependent on the skill of a person to ascend the ladder of the labour market in order to increase access to assets. Money and resources become epitomes of capitalism and as such, their possession is a representation (a fetish) of success. Thus, the label of success becomes a powerful tool that has allowed capitalism to embed into the discourse and mind-sets of people.

Notwithstanding, people's hard work and effort (inside and outside the labour market) do not translate into access to resources as analysed before in the theory of use-value and exchange value. Thus, in relation to the circulation of capital, labour and sacrifice sit at opposite poles. That is to say, people deploy (non-commodified) sacrifice in order to counterbalance the scarcity of resources (food, water, electricity and others) that realised labour in the exchange process cannot. Thus, both sacrifice and hard work are in constant contradiction. Yet, in their relation with people, sacrifice and labour confirm each other as forms of agency. Accordingly, the commodification of agency realised in capitalist production occurs through means of surplus extraction of labour, whereas agency exercised to "*get by*" with poverty attempts to accommodate resources for the satisfaction of needs.

A life in poverty entails that the exercise of agency through sacrifice (non-commodified) and effort (in the labour process) do not amount to the satisfaction of needs. This is the case because the remuneration for effort and sacrifice does not correspond to the time invested but also because that remuneration does not suffice to access goods and services for the satisfaction of needs. Therefore, needs mirror human agency. However, not in the measure that political economists and policy makers often assume: that the amount of effort and sacrifice deployed by people directly equates to satisfaction of needs. On the contrary, needs mirror human agency to the extent that when people deploy such sacrifice there is a prevalent dissatisfaction of needs, which in turn signals that the effort in the form of labour did not translate into access to resources for the satisfaction of needs. This is a paramount distinction, for this form of sacrifice is indeed characteristic of a life in poverty, and while it confirms agency at the

individual level (“*get by*” and “*get on*” with poverty), at the social level it reflects a manifestation of unmet needs of members of society.

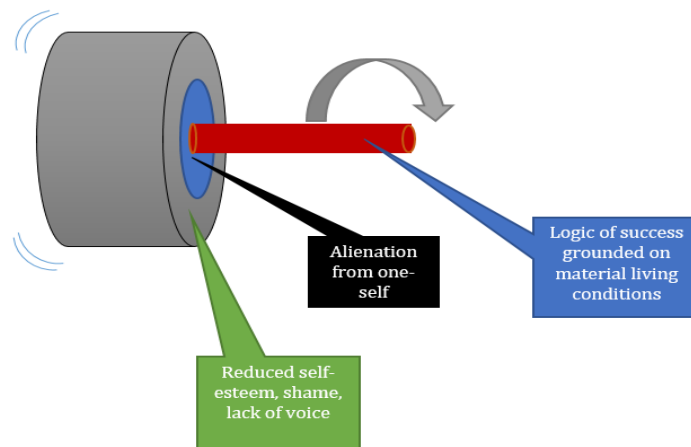
From there, it is possible to state that people deploy agency to channel their aspirations, which through labour, effort and sacrifice transform into resources for themselves and their children. It is in this way that parent’s aspirations become children’s material access to assets. Notwithstanding, mainstream approaches to the intergenerational transmission of poverty emphasise the way parents pass on to children of a set of traits, values, behaviours, attitudes and ways of life that ultimately perpetuate poverty (Williams et al., 1999) and signal the failure of households to escape it. This is the approach of *Prospera*, which aims to break with such inheritance by changing behaviours, accommodating attitudes, and encouraging aspirations and values aligned with a logic of success via bi-monthly cash transfers.

However, and as previously mentioned, the sacrifice required to navigate poverty entails a deprivation of things, unsatisfied needs and unrealised critical agency among people whose experience of poverty worsens when it comes attached to limited or lack of resources for their children. Thus, past, present and future capital collide with people’s experiences of poverty, insofar as people’s access to resources when they are children is the past labour, sacrifice and effort of their parents converted into forms of capital (commodities and services). It is through this lens of circulation of capital vis-à-vis accumulation of disadvantages and deprivations that the intergenerational transmission of poverty transcends the mainstream discourses of poverty prevalent in policy spheres.

The lack of material conditions fundamental for the satisfaction of needs and realisation of critical agency thereof that characterise poverty disrupts the individuality of people. This type of alienation, the alienation from the self, rests on the contradiction between hard work (inside and outside the production process) and the circulation of capital. Thus, **alienation from oneself is a separation of individuals from their personal power exercised socially to lead a life of their own choosing. It entails a**

reduction of power to fight for dignity in private and public spheres because of the “*success-failure*” logic based on material living conditions. This forces shame, reduced self-esteem and lack of voice onto people, leaving them vulnerable to social dynamics of inequality, violence, exploitation and derision (Chart 5).

**Chart 5:** The motion of alienation from oneself



Accordingly, “*alienation is neither purely objective nor purely subjective, but a negative relationship between social structures and humans in heteronomous societies.*” (Fuchs, 2018: 456). That is to say, the alienation experienced in poverty refers to personal struggles socially that are intrinsically related with unsatisfied needs resulting from material deprivations that are also social, cultural and political deprivations. These struggles of fighting for dignity; dealing with shame and “*othering*”; resisting salaried (formal and informal) and un-salaried (caring, parenting) labour and other forms of exploitation; fighting for subsistence and satisfaction of needs; navigating bureaucracy and a wide variety of public and private service provision contour the exercise of individual agency. However, under conditions of poverty, the material conditions fundamental to fulfilling personal projects are inaccessible and as such individuals are less able to exercise their agency in fulfilling ways. This is in essence the alienation from one-self reflected in the reduced control over the realisation of personal agency in ways people deem fulfilling and due to the logic of “*success*” functional to

capitalist neoliberalism people experience reduced self-esteem, lack of voice and shame.

#### 3.3.4. *Alienation from others*

The treatment that people in poverty receive largely interplays with power dynamics that range from the community to people's interaction with the welfare system. Such dynamics are often negotiated and adapted. However, in that adaptation, there is a constant tension between a household's satisfaction of needs and the fulfilment of social roles. The power dynamics that contour social interaction stand in opposition to people's satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency inasmuch as the fulfilment of those roles advanced by a material and symbolic construing of poverty alienates the social-self.

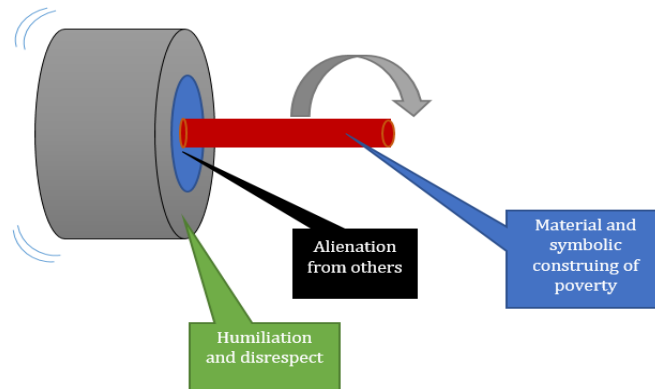
This structuring of social dynamics is prone to the circulation of capital because it rests on the ethos of competition advanced particularly under capitalist neoliberalism, as chapter two discussed. That is to say, it aims to stratify people according to performance in the labour market and consumption patterns. Thus, it calls for resilient and self-reliant individuals via social dynamics of competition. It operates via processes of symbolic violence, shaming and "*othering*" that ultimately drive a discourse of "*deservingness*" in the state-individual interaction.

Accordingly, symbolic violence entails "*the internalisation of ideas and structures that tend to subordinate certain groups of people, [and] masks the underlying power relation*" (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016: 8). The complicity, misrecognition and condescension concomitant with symbolic violence entail a treatment towards people in poverty that diminishes the self-esteem of people on the receiving end. This, coupled with the processes of "*othering*" and shaming prevalent in the experiences of people in poverty (Dieterlen, 2003; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Walker, 2014), weakens the social fabric.

To the extent in which it embeds in the socialisation of people in poverty, the “*deservingness*” logic gains explicative power. This is the result of its appeal to some prejudiced ‘common sense’ about people’s lives, in particular that people who have not taken advantage of the opportunities and resources available in society are “*poor*”. This, coupled with a welfare system based on surveillance of behaviour, puts forward a logic of evaluating people in terms of their living conditions, attitudes and aspirations. Thus, labelling, stereotyping, symbolic violence, shaming and “*othering*” increase the asymmetries of power among and against people in poverty.

This is the case given that the material impossibility of satisfying needs together with the attachment of denigrating labels to people in poverty, as in the case of the “*deservingness*” discourse, hinders people’s participation in society. This is the essence of **alienation from others that is a separation of individuals from communal links, a disruption of collectivity and reduced participation in society in meaningful and fulfilling ways. Ultimately, it means a reduction of power to organise for the betterment of their borough, community and society. This manifests as the reduced or loss of social cohesion, hindered societal capacity to fight against dynamics of discrimination and exploitation and the reduced capacity of the social-self to cushion for the harms of the dynamics of the circulation of capital due to the material and social construing of poverty. This pushes disrespect, isolation, suspicion, fear and humiliation onto people leaving them vulnerable to shaming discourses of poverty, social derision and opprobrium (Chart 6).**

**Chart 6:** The motion of alienation from others



As such, "alienation extends beyond the economy so that also the state and ideology alienate humans from the conditions of collective political decision-making and cultural meaning-making" (Harvey, 2018: 456). Thus, alienation means a disruption of collectivity inasmuch as trust in others necessary to create safe spaces for social interaction diminishes. Furthermore, because of the material and symbolic construing of poverty, people are less able to participate in society in ways that permit them to express their self and voice their opinion, which hinders social cohesion and thus harms the social fabric. Therefore, alienation from others takes place at a relational level where the social-self lessens its potential of cushioning from the harms of phenomena such as an economic crisis, a natural disaster, a political shift in welfare provision or more personally experienced issues such as going into debt, unemployment or the loss of a loved one. Thus, alienation from others takes place via a material and symbolic construing of poverty evidenced in the processes of "othering", shame and symbolic violence fuelled by a discourse of "deservingness" that aligns with the logic of the "neoliberal self" (Gill, 2008; Wacquant, 2010).



social-self, it entails a disruption of social cohesion and collectivity because of the material and symbolic construing of poverty.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has put in theoretical motion a theory of alienation applied to poverty. To that end, it developed a critical approach to needs, agency and poverty drawing from theories of use-value and circulation of capital. In the first step, it advanced an approach to socially developed needs and the realisation of individual agency socially within socio-historical developments. Accordingly, it emphasised the content of needs and agency vis-à-vis their dialectical relation with the materially constraining reality. In the second step, it provisioned an approach to poverty in line with a conceptualisation of capital circulation and an emphasis on capitalist neoliberalism. In the second step, it critically analysed mainstream and key approaches to needs, agency and poverty to underscore the importance of understanding poverty from the vantage point of people's life trajectories. There, it particularly engaged with the development of measures and understandings of poverty, while drawing attention to their limitation with regard to needs and agency. As a third step, it built on the Marxian theory of use-value to frame the development of the circulation of capital and positioned a definition of alienation applied to poverty. To that end, it developed the three levels of alienation (alienation from resources, alienation from oneself and alienation from others) and the specific mechanisms through which the material hardships of poverty become internalised in the relational/symbolic experiences of poverty.



## Chapter IV Methodology

*“It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition... with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. ... if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations.”*

*Karl Marx, Grundrisse, 1971, p. 112*

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the steps taken to answer the research questions set in the introduction. Thus, the content of this chapter clarifies how each section contributes to answering the central research question: *How does the notion of alienation aid the understanding of the relation between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty and its impact on society?* To that end, this chapter starts positioning this research in terms of ontology and epistemology. In the first section particular attention goes to the development of dialectics and the philosophy of internal relations defined in the theory chapter. It explains how this approach, coupled with chapter two, answers the first research sub-question: *To what extent can Prospera be viewed as an archetype of neoliberal policy?* Then, the second section explains the research design. In particular, it justifies the rationale behind the selection of *Prospera* as a case study. The third section develops the design of the methods. It explains the sampling and recruitment process of research participants and the development of the topic guide. Relevant here is the link between the theory and the development of the research instruments to answer the three research questions related to alienation: (1) *In what ways does Prospera hinder the satisfaction of needs for its recipients in terms of their resources and opportunities?* (2) *In what ways does Prospera impact the “self” of its beneficiaries in terms of self-worth, self-esteem and power over their living conditions?* (3) *To what extent does Prospera promote internal division among its beneficiaries and within the broader society?* The fourth section then focuses on the piloting. It pays particular attention to

reflection about the pilot, implications and changes to the topic guide. The fifth section focuses on the process of collecting and managing data. The sixth section explains the process of analysing data and how that influenced the final stage of the development of the theory. The last section deals with the ethics of this research; specifically, dealing with issues of informed consent, avoiding harm, and translation implications. All in all, this chapter clarifies the steps taken throughout this doctoral thesis to explain the interaction between the material hardships and relational/symbolic aspects of poverty.

#### **4.1. Ontology and epistemology**

A first key step in the development of a methodology relates to the researcher's reflexivity, that is "*the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself: subject and object fuse*" (Ruby, 1982: 13). Thus, reflexivity entails accounting for a combination of factors including the material world, personal experience and approach to reality, interests and exogenous constraints. Dialectically speaking, this leads to a process of abstraction that entails selecting units of analysis and specific groups of relations among those units, in order to classify, analyse and explain them (Ollman, 2003). To that end, the philosophy of internal relations offers a sound position to make possible this method of inquiry, organising and expounding findings.

As referred to in chapter three this first step of applying the philosophy of internal relations puts in motion dialectics as a method of enquiry and exposition and requires us to approach things as relations. In other words, it entails accounting for the interdependence of abstracts in relation to their space and time connections. An example of this was the approach to the intergenerational transmission of poverty developed in chapter three, where the understanding of socially available resources accounted for the past and present hard work and effort of parents with regard their children's and their household's needs.

The second step to set the dialectics in motion is the process of abstraction that provides boundaries to the philosophy of internal relations. As will become clearer throughout this thesis, using dialectics as a method of inquiry illuminates the contradictions of CCT and ultimately of capitalist neoliberalism through the lens of people living in poverty. Thus, the dialectic method starts by establishing units of analysis called abstracts which are essential to understanding internal relations of social dynamics and then uses the philosophy of internal relations to illuminate contradictions of phenomena. An example of this was the development of the theory of alienation from the self in relation to an idea of success based on material and symbolic living standards within the capitalist mode of production, as chapter three theorised.

The “*objectivism*” that has invaded social sciences and increased in influence in recent decades advances a conception of a reality independent from perception or knowledge. That is to say, the “*ontological position that asserts that social phenomenon and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors*” (Bryman, 2012: 713) has pervaded positivists and post-positivists (Grix, 2004) alike. Epistemologically speaking, such a paradigm assumes the verifiability of facts through concrete methods, which objectively reflect reality (Morçöl, 2001). Accordingly, social scientists such as Fitzgerald dismissed the discussion of ethical terms in social sciences and treated concepts such as self-realisation or shame as metaphysical (Fitzgerald, 1977).

Largely, this has been due to the influence of Anglo-American philosophy and logical positivism which have pushed for a “*significant*” scientific language based on physics. That is to say, the psychological terms of language should refer to brain states only. However, there is strong evidence that this conception is merely a social construct and has no scientific basis (Putnam, 2002: 28). However, “*objectivists*” have carried out a theoretical endeavour for the artificial creation of the dichotomy of facts and values on a narrow “*scientific base*”, namely, separating description from evaluation, the objective from the value judgment. This argument builds on the idea that it is not possible to argue about value judgments, as these are subjective; a good example of this is welfare economics, where orthodox economists have developed theories that focus

on the optimisation of earnings for individuals through aggregated demand (Friedman, 1977; WB, 1990 1994). This has permeated discussions about poverty to such an extent that the emphasis has been on all that is measurable, diminishing all that is not, as in the case of power dynamics or personal experiences of material deprivations.

In contrast to this, constructivism as an *“ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors”* (Bryman, 2012: 710) has differed on the theories about knowledge reflected in modernist and postmodernist approaches. However, they share an inter-subjective conception of processes in which identities and interests are endogenous to interaction. Accordingly, constructivists have built on the epistemological approach of multiple interpretations of the social reality where society, culture and history play a fundamental role in that interpretation and as such, perception is fundamental for the understanding of reality. However, factual description and evaluation are intrinsically related and entangled given that *“normative judgments are essential to science”* (Putnam, 2002: 32) and even in the descriptive use of a *“thick ethical concept”* they are evaluated by the user. Recognising that arguments claim objective validity but at the same time are shaped by a particular culture, is valid in both ethical and scientific questions (Putnam, 2002).

As previously mentioned, this thesis builds on the philosophy of internal relations proposed by Hegel and advanced by Marx (Hegel, 2010; Marx, 1904; 1971). It argues for the use of a relational approach to achieve a balance when approaching the external world – and the acceptance of the sense of perception as key for unfolding reality – and sustains that the conceptual apparatus is key for the particular form in which people grasp the world. Therefore, *“The conditions of its existence [of an object] are taken to be part of what it is and are indicated by the fact that it is just this and nothing else.”* (Ollman, 2003: 37). In other words, an object exists in a given time and space in its interaction with other objects and in the social world, in its interaction with the social practices in force in that moment, as well as the institutions that allowed that object to exist.

To apply internal relations is to understand relations as the core element of every abstract used to mediate knowledge with social reality: society understood relationally. Accordingly, because the relation between and among units is an ontological relation, if a key relation changes, the very unit abstracted will transform. Hence, time and space are intrinsic to the abstracted units. *“To conceive of things as Relations is simply to interiorize this interdependence (between things as taken into account in their time and space connections) in the thing itself”* (Ollman, 2003: 36).

To summarise, dialectics focuses on change and interaction. That is, it assumes that understanding an object is defining its boundaries, which comes through mental and social constructions and as such, things are conceived of and approached as processes and relations starting from the system inwards and back to the system. Thus, this thesis understands the relation between reality, an interrelated whole with its concomitant change and interaction, and the researcher goals, positionality and needs manifested in the analysis through the process of abstraction and social relations. This is a *“two-leg method”* of dialectics wherein *“We “see” only some of what lies in front of us... Likewise, in thinking about any subject, we focus on only some of its qualities and relations... The mental activity involved in establishing such boundaries, whether conscious or unconscious – though it is usually an amalgam of both – is the process of abstraction”* (Ollman, 2003: 60). Contrary to misleading accounts of dialectics (Althusser, 1969), the philosophy of internal relations entails that reality and perception remain in constant association. Therefore, through the process of abstraction with a relational view, reality becomes apprehensible. Dialectics is set in motion through those two steps and follows a particular process, as discussed in what follows.

This approach to reality and method of inquiry fits with the analysis of the contradictory nature of capitalism passed on to capital-neoliberalism, which in turn is reflected in welfare provision in Mexico, as the findings chapters analyse. Hence, dialectics are crucial for this thesis, particularly in the light of hitherto static understandings and measures of poverty that emphasise either the material conditions

of poverty or, to a lesser extent, the subjective experience of it, as discussed in chapter one. Thus, putting in motion dialectics through the philosophy of internal relations and the process of abstraction permits us to investigate the inner dynamics of living in poverty, as the last section of this chapter further elaborates. In particular, it enables us to investigate the relation between the circulation of capital and people's experience of it, as theorised in chapter two and put in motion in chapters four, five and six.

## **4.2. Research design**

The focus of this thesis is to shed theoretical light on the relation between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty. The case selected to grasp this relation was *Prospera*, one of the oldest CCT programmes worldwide. The selection of this programme responded to both the researcher's previous background and the media portrait of poverty on the decline thanks to CCT interventions. The first section details the rationale for selecting the corpus of literature analysed in this thesis and develops the three steps taken for the literature view. The second section justifies the selection of a qualitative case study research design.

### *4.2.1. A three step approach*

To have a clear understanding of what the programme had accomplished, the data behind the government praise of *Prospera* and more importantly the methodologies and methods previously used to analyse it, required a semi-systematic literature review. The semi-systematic literature review entailed a three step process.

The first step was critically analysing 154 internal and external evaluations. The purpose of this was to understand the outcomes and limitations of *Prospera* found in the literature. This required a manual tracking of 154 internal and external evaluations via the official website of *Prospera* which lists in chronological order all the evaluations mandated by the Mexican government.

The decision to review the internal and external evaluations was to characterise the evolution of Prospera, understand the setbacks discussed in the literature and ultimately pinpoint the gaps in the literature. To do that, it followed a revision of evaluations from the very first official evaluation done by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to the latest report issued on the official website of *Prospera* in 2015<sup>67</sup>. This also allowed the changes in *Prospera* itself and the approaches to measuring its success to be captured, as chapter two analysed.

The second step was reviewing journal articles and books about *Prospera* and CCT worldwide. The purpose of this was to find commonalities as well as differences in relation to both support and criticism of CCT programmes. This required citation and bibliographic tracking of the official evaluations of *Prospera* that allowed main authors and additional key references to be detected. Furthermore, it required a manual search on the University of Birmingham Library repository and online search engines including google scholar, isee, and redalyc, looking for the following key words in the title of the documents: the three names of CCT programmes in Mexico (*Progresas, Oportunidades, Prospera*), “*Mexican social policy*” and “*conditional cash transfer programmes*” both in Spanish and English (Table 11). This provided a deeper understanding of the assumptions and politics behind neoliberal social policy, which also prepared the ground for the development of the theoretical chapter.

**Table 11: Search engines results by key word**

	<b>Progresas</b>	<b>Oportunidades</b>	<b>Prospera</b>	<b>Mexican Social Policy</b>	<b>Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes (CCT)</b>
Iseek	11	8	3	28	45

<sup>67</sup> This was the cutoff point of the review process of internal and external evaluations. The reasons for that, as analysed in chapter two, is because after reviewing 17 years of evaluations, it was possible to extract the rationale behind those evaluations, and the core assumptions, purposes, goals and policy recommendations. Furthermore, as analysed in chapters two and three, the official government discourse backed by support from international financial institutions, has been to praise the positive results of CCT programmes. Additionally, as discussed in chapter two, official evaluations stick to guidelines set by the government itself which in turn serve the purpose of issuing comparable data across years.

Redalyk	89	63	57	33	280	
University of Birmingham Library	49	35	22	10	380	
Google scholar	187	123	80	41	420	
Total	336	229	162	112	1,125	<b>1,964</b>

Apart from the internal and external evaluations that also appeared in this manual search, the result was the selection of 56 journal articles, 20 reports from financial institutions and 6 books mainly focused on *Prospera* and CCT worldwide. The selection of the relevant literature corresponded to the most cited or quoted journal articles and books, authored by members of the panel of experts that undertook internal or external evaluations of *Prospera* and reports from international financial institutions that have financed *Prospera*. The review of these journals and books heavily informed the development of chapter two, as evidenced by the review of the literature about CCT programmes with a particular focus on Mexico. Furthermore, it prepared the ground for the critical appraisal of *Prospera* evidenced in chapters five, six and seven.

The third step was reviewing official government documents about *Prospera*. The purpose of this was to understand the government use of the findings produced by the evaluations, as well as the government's praise of *Prospera* and claims regarding poverty alleviation, as chapter two analysed. This entailed manual searches of policy briefings issued by the Ministry of Development in relation to *Prospera*, available on the government's website. In particular, it meant reviewing every annual Presidential address to the nation from 1988 to 2018.

Those documents summarise the goals, objectives of the development policy and specific strategies followed by the government. 1988 was selected as the first year to review those documents because that was the first year of government of the then President Salinas de Gortari, who signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and subscribed to the Washington Consensus. Largely because of the



Transparency Law that entered into force in 2002, all government documentation is now publicly available and the most recent public documents are accessible online, which reduced the time and cost of accessing information.

As a result, 30 Presidential addresses to the nation were reviewed. The analysis of these documents together with the historical account of social policy and development in Mexico permitted a clearer account of the contradictions between the federal definition of poverty and the approach to fight poverty by *Prospera* discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, this step was fundamental as it provided the basis for the approach to poverty and needs developed in the theory chapter.

**Chart 8:** The three steps of the literature review



To summarise (Chart 8), the literature review was conducted through manual searches and bibliographic and citation tracking, and encompassed 153 internal and external evaluations, 36 journal articles, 20 reports from financial institutions, 4 books and 30 Presidential addresses to the nation. This allowed gaps in the literature to be identified, in order to position the relevance of this thesis with regard to previous research while also underscoring its novelty.

#### 4.2.2. Case study research design

This thesis undertakes qualitative research to investigate the dynamics of capitalist neoliberalism, poverty and social policy in Mexico. Accordingly, in this type of inquiry “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). The setting chosen for this investigation is beneficiaries of the social programme *Prospera* in urban and rural areas. The reason for this choice was

that qualitative research pays attention to “*the importance of the participants’ frames of reference*” (Ormston et al., 2003: 3). For this thesis, the focus is on people living in urban and rural areas of Mexico in order to account for their “*understanding of the social world... their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories*” (Ormston et al., 2003: 3) in relation to the case study selected: *Prospera*.

Accordingly, case study research is a “*research [for] exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources*” (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 544). Several studies have demonstrated the relevance of case study research design with qualitative analysis to investigate the experiences of vulnerable populations (Gubrium et al., 2014), austerity (Pemberton et al., 2016) and disability (Christianson et al., 2002). Thus, the decision at the onset of the fieldwork planning was to develop a case study.

The instrumental case study (Glynis, 2000: 437) selected was the social programme *Prospera* as it suited the overarching question about the importance of alienation to understand the link between poverty, social policy and neoliberalism. As discussed in chapters two and three, the size and scope of this social programme make it the flagship of poverty alleviation in Mexico (*Prospera*, 2017) for which the government has named it the most successful antipoverty strategy in that country (SEDESOL, 2014). The interest in analysing people’s experiences of poverty from the vantage point of social policy under capitalist neoliberalism justified the selection of *Prospera* as a case study. Thus, this method fitted perfectly with the research goals inasmuch as it allowed the analysis of experiences of beneficiaries of *Prospera*. In particular, and in order to understand the alienation from resources, from the self and from other welfare recipients, this thesis focuses on the actual functioning of the programme, as opposed to an exegetical analysis of its rules of operation.

An investigation via quantitative research would have provided an opportunity, for instance, to explain the relation between *Prospera* and human capital formation that is not within the scope of this thesis. Notwithstanding, quantitative

research would have not been pertinent for the purposes of this thesis given that the focus was on the experiences of people as opposed to the measurable impact of *Prospera* in terms of health, nutrition or education.

The use of focus groups, as originally envisioned, would have allowed collective views on the meaning of poverty to be gathered from practitioners, as well as the ideas surrounding people in poverty and the functioning of *Prospera*. However, the decision not to use this method almost at the outset was prompted by two main reasons. First, the time and cost associated with bringing practitioners from two different cities together (Mexico City and Xalapa). Accordingly, the distance between these two cities (over 280 km) would have made it practically impossible for the researcher to manage the agenda of practitioners and the associated costs. Second, practitioners would have provided a limited account of how *Prospera* operates on the ground, particularly given its differing functioning from urban to rural and within urban areas as evidenced in the findings chapters. In fact, conducting semi-structured interviews with practitioners and policy makers resulted in more robust and nuanced data as evidenced in the findings chapters.

Therefore, a case study research design was key to investigating the practices, experiences around poverty of rural and urban communities with a focus on beneficiaries of *Prospera*. This was in line with the research aim of filling the gap in the literature: the contradictions that CCT programmes pose to the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency of welfare recipients.

To summarise, given that the emphasis was on people's experiences of poverty with regard to *Prospera*, qualitative research with a case study research design was the right approach to undertake this investigation. The investigation therefore followed a series of semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, practitioners and experts, as detailed in what follows.

### **4.3. Methods design**

Designing methods entails the selection of appropriate strategies according to the research purpose and research questions. Thus, “*there are only methods that are appropriate to your research topic and the model with which you are working*” (Silverman, 2010: 124). The purpose of the first section is to explain the sampling techniques used for the selection of cases and research participants. The second section explains the recruitment process and the importance of gatekeepers. The third section explains the development of the topic guide used for the semi-structured interviews.

#### *4.3.1. Sampling*

Explaining people’s experiences of Prospera required a look at how it worked on the ground. The pilot and fieldwork, explained in what follows, took place in the State of Veracruz and Mexico City. These two States were selected on the basis of access to gatekeepers as well as the presence of *Prospera*. In particular, this research focused on two rural and two urban areas of Mexico. This decision fitted the purpose of explaining the dynamics of poverty via the experiences of welfare support in Mexico. Furthermore, selecting four areas provided sufficient time to plan and commute from one place to the other during the fieldwork. A larger number of communities would have made it unmanageable during the time frame and given the resources allotted for the fieldwork.

The selection of the two urban areas and the two rural areas allowed sufficient and relevant information to be gathered. Furthermore, it allowed the capture of diverse perspectives of research participants living in urban and urban areas in relation to *Prospera*. This heterogeneous sampling of locations also allowed the investigation of relationships between people’s experiences, their place of residence and the functioning of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas. Additionally, this made sure that trust from research participants prevailed. Accordingly, gatekeepers advised focus on those areas for two reasons. Firstly, as a result of the trust built up during the years of working with them, research participants in those areas would be more willing to open

up and answer very specific questions about their personal life and benefits. Secondly, the population I would have access to would fit the criteria established in this research (beneficiaries who have received the benefits for several years and are still in receipt of welfare support, some beneficiaries who have been spokespersons in the past, some beneficiaries who were spokespersons at the moment of the fieldwork, and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera* who have interactions with beneficiaries). Ultimately, this thesis focused on four areas because of the research interest of analysing the dynamics of poverty through the lens of social welfare.

The capital city of Mexico City and the city of Xalapa were the urban cases selected, while the communities of *Zapotal* and *Milpas* were the rural cases chosen (Table 12). The selection of these four areas was an instrumental decision given that they supported the investigation of the experiences of poverty in relation to the specific functioning of *Prospera*. This then paved the way for the analysis of the contradictions of capitalist neoliberalism, as theorised in chapter three. That is to say, in an “instrumental case study research, the researcher explores a case as an instance of a class in order to shed light on an issue concerning the class” (Fuller et al., 2003: 422). It was thus fundamental to analyse the cases in depth, but without neglecting context (Stake, 2005).

**Table 12:** Descriptive information about the four research sites

Place	Type of area	Total population
Mexico City	Urban area - capital of the Country	8,918,653 inhabitants
Xalapa	Urban area - capital of the state of Veracruz	520,151 inhabitants
Milpas	Rural area in the State of Veracruz - mainly fisherman	1,529 inhabitants
Zapotal	Rural area in the State of Veracruz - mainly farmers	1,050 inhabitants

\*Source: INEGI, 2015

Given that the research questions and goals of this thesis are explicative, “the selection of cases is based on theoretical considerations. Here ... cases are screened for

*their ability to falsify theories or hypothesis that are derived from earlier research*" (Wiebe et al., 2009: 62). This method suited this thesis aims of explaining poverty by developing a theory of alienation applied to poverty and falsified in the Mexican context. Therefore, the four areas selected to conduct fieldwork set the geographical and temporal boundaries of the thesis, while the selection of research participants reflected the research focus and the particular theoretical framework of this investigation.

Thus, the focus was on the actual experiences of poverty vis-à-vis welfare provision by *Prospera* rather than how the programme operates, given that *"Coming to understand a case usually requires extensive examining of how things get done, but the prime referent in case study is the case, not the methods by which the case operates"* (Stake, 2005: 444). For the selection of cases and subjects of research, random sampling was not a priority, given that *"case study researchers are not interested in a strict process of sampling"* (Cousin, 2005: 423). In fact, variety and opportunity (Stake, 2005: 451), amenability to research access (Cousin, 2005), as well as an expedient selection treating cases as unique (Aaltio and Heilmann, 2009: 67) led the selection method.

This thesis followed a heterogeneous approach to sampling (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 79), deliberately choosing phenomena with wide variations from one another. Accordingly, it deployed a purposive sample by *"building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study"* (Stake: 2005: 451). That is to say, with a purposive sampling researchers *"seek out groups, settings and individuals where... the processes being studied are most likely to occur"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 202). Furthermore, the goal was to approach sampling in terms of how to demonstrate *"that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand"* (Alasuutari, 1995: 156) and the extrapolation of cases to theoretical propositions. Accordingly, this was essential to provide a thick and deep analysis based on availability and access to actors and settings (Cousin, 2007).

The four areas and research participants selected came to represent the wider population of *Prospera's* beneficiaries. In particular, this research did not choose the areas and interviewees because they were “*typical*” beneficiaries of *Prospera*; what mattered was the extent to which their experiences of welfare support were typical of the wider phenomena of beneficiaries of *Prospera*. The development of the piloting and the fieldwork, however, relied on a snowball sampling. In the four areas investigated, gatekeepers granted access to research participants. Interviewees then referred other potential participants that fitted the purpose of this research and were willing to participate. This type of sampling was particularly relevant when participants didn't show up or canceled last minute.

To summarise, the instrumental case study research followed in this thesis used a heterogeneous approach to sampling, relying on theoretical considerations, and a purposive and snowball sampling during the piloting and fieldwork. In the end, the fieldwork took place in four areas selected with a total of fifty-four research participants (piloting and fieldwork).

#### *4.3.2. Recruitment process*

The recruitment process took place through eight gatekeepers contacted via professional contacts developed previously by the researcher. The recruitment places of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera*, as per advice of gatekeepers, were local public schools and health centres. This approach considerably reduced time and transportation costs. Furthermore, it allowed actual differences between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households to be accounted for.

Originally, the fieldwork plan was to interview 52 parents, 7 policy makers and 2 researchers. Notwithstanding, the final numbers were 36 mothers, 2 fathers, 3 policy makers, 4 practitioners and 1 researcher specialised on CCT; a total of 54 interviews through piloting and fieldwork together.

The particular focus on women during the fieldwork responded to four key factors. Firstly, *Prospera* relies mostly on beneficiary women to comply with conditionalities, as analysed in chapter two. Therefore, they were better suited to explain the functioning and implications of *Prospera* for their household's needs. Secondly, the local dynamics advanced by *Prospera* pushed men further away from their involvement with the programme as well as from the negotiation of resources within households as analysed in chapter five. Thirdly, women as main beneficiaries of the programme were better positioned to refer other women beneficiaries to participate in the research. Fourthly, the subsumption of patriarchal exploitation within capitalism, as explained in chapter three, made clear the importance of focusing on women's voices as part of the research interviews.

The final number of research interviews reflects the “saturation point” (Bryman, 2012) reached during the semi-structured interviews. In other words, the fieldwork stopped once the interviews - conducted via the research instruments explained in what follows - yielded sufficient information, the categories were well developed and all the dimensions covered in enough variation as well as when the relations among chosen categories were clear and validated (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Moreover, the interview process ended when the data stopped offering theoretical insights and no new emerging dimensions could be drawn from the interviews.

Furthermore, the number of interviews underscores the accessibility and time schedule of policy makers, and access to practitioners (Wiebe et al., 2009). Ultimately, accessibility to the community, availability of information and usefulness and coherence with the research questions and objectives (Wiebe et al., 2009) defined the number of interviews (Table 13).

**Table 13:** Distribution of research participants piloting – fieldwork

Piloting		
Place	Role	Number of interviewees
<i>Milpas</i>	Beneficiaries	3
<i>Xalapa</i>	Beneficiaries	2
<b>Mexico City</b>	Beneficiaries	1



		Practitioners	2
		<i>Total</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>Fieldwork</b>			
<b>Place</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>	
<b>Milpas</b>	Beneficiaries	9	
	Non-beneficiaries	4	
<b>Zapotlan</b>	Beneficiaries	9	
	Non-beneficiaries	2	
<b>Xalapa</b>	Beneficiaries	6	
	Non-beneficiaries	3	
	Practitioners	4	
	Researcher	1	
<b>Mexico City</b>	Beneficiaries	4	
	Non-beneficiaries	1	
	Policy makers	3	
		<i>Total</i>	<b>46</b>

The focus on the role of *Prospera* as an archetype of neoliberalism reflects the difference between the numbers of beneficiaries interviewed (34) as compared to non-beneficiaries (10) of that programme (Table 14). In particular, the research interest of understanding the role of *Prospera* in advancing the alienation of welfare recipients explains this difference. However, the inclusion of non-beneficiaries also reflects the important research considerations in terms of alienation from others. More specifically, in order to analyse the extent to which *Prospera* promotes internal division among its beneficiaries and within the broader society, it was necessary to also interview non-beneficiaries that had links with beneficiaries of the programme.

**Table 14:** Total number of research participants by role

	<b>Piloting</b>	<b>Fieldwork</b>	<b>Total</b>
Practitioners	2	4	6
Policy makers	-	3	3
Researcher	-	1	1
Non-beneficiaries	-	10	10
Beneficiaries	6	28	34

Similarly, interviewing practitioners responded to theoretical considerations as well as considerations after analysing data from the piloting. The goal of these interviews was to account for differences on perspectives, opinions, expectations and approaches to beneficiaries of *Prospera*. In particular, they aim to illuminate the alienation from the self and the extent to which practitioners reproduced and enacted

the materially grounded idea of success onto people in poverty and particularly beneficiaries of *Prospera*. These interviews entailed working together with public institutions such as schools and health care centres to schedule suitable times and places.

Accessing the three policy makers directly working in the implementation or administration of *Prospera* required several email exchanges in line with the ethical process approved by the University of Birmingham<sup>68</sup>. Accordingly, the purpose of these interviews with policy makers, which took place at their work facilities, was to obtain key insights into the general framing of poverty and particularly the government approach to beneficiaries and people experiencing poverty. Furthermore, the interview with the researcher aimed to illuminate the role of academia in the Mexican government's framing of poverty, while also to highlight some of the tensions between researchers and policy makers and the type of concessions needed to arrive at the current multidimensional definition of poverty, as chapter two analysed.

In particular, the interviews with policy makers and practitioners helped to focus the "*deservingness*" rationale with regard to welfare provision and its concomitant day-to-day use through government bureaucracy, as evidenced in chapter five. While they provided core data referenced throughout this thesis and the voices of people in poverty are centre stage in this thesis, those of policy makers, the researcher and practitioners are purposefully less prominent, as evidenced on chapter five, six and seven.

#### 4.3.3. *Topic guides*

A thematic framework analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) arose as a key strategy to develop the themes as well as the research instruments. This proved highly effective as it was in line with the type of theory developed as well as the key topics or abstracts

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<sup>68</sup> The ethical approval number provided by the University of Birmingham to this doctoral thesis is ERN\_15-1664

chosen for this thesis. The types of research participants chosen required designing two different research instruments, one tailored to beneficiaries of *Prospera* and the other focused on practitioners.

As previously mentioned, this thesis used semi-structured interviews as a data collection strategy (Silverman, 2010) because it fitted the purpose of flexibility in allowing research participants to explain their experiences at their own pace, providing rich and thorough answers, and ultimately allowing theories and concepts to arise from the data. However, this type of interview also allowed the research to guide interviewees to answer the research questions driving this thesis.

#### *4.3.3.1. Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries*

The development of the topic guide for ordering data meant having to “*steer the discussion in an interview... but not as an exact prescription of coverage*” (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003: 115). Accordingly, the topic guide (Appendix 10) developed to interview beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries consisted of six parts plus background and closure. This division sought to capture the experiences of living in poverty by tracing the impacts and contradictions within *Prospera*. Thus, in line with research standards (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003; Bryman, 2012; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), the background information aimed to ease the interviewees into the interview process of data collection. Specifically, it looked for contextual information and lived realities of research participants, which proved efficient for locating participant responses in time and place as well as for informing follow-up questions. Probing here focused on background, and issues to do with their material circumstances. Thus, the type of prompts developed focused on employment, education, income and personal relationships.

Section two focused on alienation from others. The literature showed that this type of alienation takes place at a relational level and in particular in the everyday experiences of power relations (Ferguson et al., 2002; Marx, 1971). The alienation in poverty that this theory puts forward theorised that people experience it in the form of

disrespect, reduced social bonding and hampered social cohesion. In particular, it theorised the shame and stigma attached to their material living conditions. To that end, for instance, this section asked questions about shame as well as disrespect they were subject to because of their economic conditions. Thus, probing here focused on local power dynamics and their interaction with figures of authority. Similarly, the type of prompts here focused on their reduced capacity to participate in society and the concomitant feelings of humiliation and disrespect.

Section three directly targeted alienation from the self. The literature showed that this form of alienation takes place where material deprivation meets unsatisfied needs (Marx, 1971; Sayers, 2011). The theory of alienation in poverty advances the notion of a materially grounded definition of success that people in poverty internalise in the form of powerlessness and reduced self-esteem. Thus, this section asked questions related to people's perception about their material conditions, and satisfaction at work, at home and during life. Accordingly, it included prompts related to personal feelings of worthiness, and personal satisfaction.

The fourth part focused on the relationship between alienation from others and the enactment of a "*deservingness*" logic upon other people in poverty. This part aimed to gather data about the material and symbolic construing of poverty and the particular type of labels attached to it. The sort of questions here focused on how and if people in poverty differentiated themselves from other people in poverty. Thus, probing used in this section related to whether people felt empathy or some sort of hidden or not so hidden thoughts of disapproval for how their neighbours lived. Prompts in this section focused on links between personal decisions and effort with material living conditions.

The fifth part dealt with alienation from resources and opportunities. The literature indicated that the access to resources determined the extent to which people were able to satisfy their needs (Kochuyt, 2004; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Villarespe, 2010). The theory of alienation in poverty advanced the geographically unequal distribution of resources as a mechanism that puts in motion this form of

alienation. Hence, the questions asked in this section looked at people's strategies to navigate poverty and ultimately people's perspective on the control they had over their living conditions. Therefore, it probed the use of their time and free time and how they managed to make ends meet. Similarly, prompts here focused on decisions about allocating household budgets, cost of life and leisure.

The sixth part applied only to beneficiaries of *Prospera*. Accordingly, it focused on its functioning, conditions attached and what the programme entailed for them. In particular, this section aimed to gather data around the role of *Prospera* in enhancing the three types of alienation theorised in chapter three. Questions in this section directly targeted people's interaction with programme representatives, what they had to go through to comply with the programme, the implications of cash transfers for their household's needs and the type of dynamics fostered by *Prospera*. Probing here focused on people's perceptions about conditionalities, feelings when complying with them, and interactions with other beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries and programme representatives because of their inclusion as welfare recipients of CCT. Prompts were about the functioning of the programme, their benefits and implications of non-compliance.

Additionally, the role of the spokespersons entailed adding a set of questions tailored to their specific functions. The purpose of this was to capture the changes in the interactions with other beneficiaries, with programme representatives and with health and education practitioners. Also, the aim was to understand the increased burden in terms of time and responsibilities that this role entailed for them and for the satisfaction of their household's needs. Probing here focused on social interactions and specific expenses attached to their role.

Finally, the closure of the topic guide focused on detaching research participants from any stressful thoughts resulting from the interview process while allowing some space to think positively about the future and their personal

experiences. In some cases, this section kick-started people's discussions about their self in relation to society in a broader sense, as analysed in chapter six.

#### *4.3.3.2. Practitioners, policy makers and researcher*

The topic guide for health and education practitioners, policy makers and the researcher aimed to capture their perspectives about *Prospera*, welfare recipients and poverty in general. Part one aimed to ease them into the interview process and get to know more about their roles. Part two directly focused on the programme *Prospera*, in particular how it works and conditions attached to it. Information from this section was useful as it evidenced some of the contradictions between what is said on paper and how it works in reality. Part three targeted perceptions about the benefits from the programme and beneficiaries. Specifically, this section focused on alienation from the self. Probing here was about the idea of success and the extent to which in their opinion *Prospera* supported in that regard, with prompts about attitudes, effort and aspirations. Part four focused on alienation from others, in particular their perspectives about people in poverty and beneficiaries. The aim here was to capture the material and symbolic construing of poverty by people directly working with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera*. Thus, it entailed probing about the perceived difference among people in poverty with prompts regarding self-reliance and resilience. Part five focused on alienation from resources. The focus was on their perception about the control people in poverty had over their living conditions. Probing here was about fairness/unfairness of the economic system, and relevance of *Prospera* in alleviating poverty. The last section aimed to capture participants' perceptions about the role of welfare support in changing people's mindsets and behaviours, and easing people out of the interview.

To summarise, the topic guides as a whole aimed to obtain information about the three forms of alienation in poverty as well as the role of *Prospera* in that regard. Furthermore, it aimed to link the functioning of *Prospera* with assumptions of self-reliance, resilience and adaption advanced by capitalist neoliberalism. Ultimately, the

topic guide focused on the relation between the material hardship and the relational/symbolic aspects of poverty.

#### **4.4. Pilot interviews**

Research shows that the distribution of income and power within rural households is not only unequal but also disempowers women (Molyneux, 2006). Given the differences of resource distribution within households, the initial plan was to include more female than male parents. During the piloting, there were very few male parents available for interview because of their work commitments. Furthermore, during the piloting and especially the fieldwork, it became clear that fathers had very little knowledge and involvement with the programme *Prospera* and that was reflected in the number of beneficiary women interviewed.

The piloting took place from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2016. It included two male beneficiaries, four female beneficiaries and two practitioners. This actually heavily influenced the data collected and ultimately the findings chapters. Given that mothers in both urban and rural areas were more engaged and knowledgeable about household needs, expenditure, community dynamics and local dynamics, the richness of data provided by beneficiary women illuminated power dynamics within households, distribution of household chores and in particular, the time burden that *Prospera* represented for them. This was coherent with the theory chapter and research goals particularly given the focus on the circulation of capital and the approach to patriarchal exploitation from the vantage point of its subsumption within capitalism. Thus, rather than a disadvantage, the fact that most interviewees were women benefited the depth, scope and richness of the analysis.

In the case of the piloting, and in order to test the extent to which the theoretical framework had any role in explaining experiences of poverty under the neoliberal paradigm, the focus was on practitioners and people in poverty. This entailed excluding from the pilot non-beneficiaries and policy makers working on poverty

alleviation. Nevertheless, because the intention of the pilot was to test the suitability of the research instruments, and indicate the presence of alienation as opposed to exhaustively explaining it, this was not an important setback, particularly because the limited number of interviews for the piloting permitted an in-depth analysis that the following subsection describes.

Due to time and budget constraints, the pilot took place in only three out of the four areas selected. As previously mentioned, gatekeepers granted access to beneficiaries of the social programme *Prospera*, three of them from the rural area of *Milpas*, one beneficiary from Mexico City, and two beneficiaries and the two practitioners from the city of Xalapa. This revealed the differing functioning of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas and depicted the functioning of alienation in relation to resources, to themselves and in their interaction with others.

The voice-recorded semi-structured interviews took place at the local school, health clinic centres and in one case within facilities provided by one of the gatekeepers. Holding interviews in these places prompted deep conversations about their life trajectories, as they trusted the gatekeepers and felt safe. Thus, to gain access to research participants, the constant exchange of communication with gatekeepers via emails before the piloting (and later the fieldwork) and then during the trips to the local areas permitted trust to be built, and made sure cooperation persisted.

Beneficiaries of *Prospera* that participated in the pilot study were those with whom gatekeepers had built good relations. This opportunity (Stake, 2005) and amenability (Cousin, 2005) to access research participants proved fundamental because research participants shared their personal experiences about the programme and about poverty, the ultimate goal of this research.

Gatekeepers also suggested that the health clinic could be used as a base to recruit the two practitioners as well as to hold some of the interviews during the piloting. Once potential participants were identified, an exchange of emails followed



before the piloting to agree times and dates for the interviews. That is to say, the gatekeepers helped to identify potential participants, but the contact was directly with interviewees. This was a different strategy from the one used with beneficiaries of *Prospera*, where the gatekeepers directly contacted, arranged and scheduled interviews.

To summarise, the 14 days of piloting in *Milpas*, Xalapa and Mexico City allowed a total of 8 interviews to be held. This provided key insights into the context of three of the four research areas, provided an opportunity to test and later adjust the research instruments and ultimately yielded useful data for the analysis of alienation, as discussed in what follows.

#### *4.4.1. Reflections about the piloting*

The analysis of data from the piloting was through the software Atlas.ti, and the use of a thematic framework analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Accordingly, it entailed organising and classifying material in themes and emergent categories. For this thesis, the thematic framework comprised themes related to the three levels of alienation with its concomitant subtopics. However, the preliminary matrix of topics that evolved from the theory of alienation and the piloting (Appendix 11) changed after the analysis of data as explained in what follows

The section of alienation from others provided useful information. People in both urban and rural areas demonstrated a certain empathy towards less advantaged people. However, when talking about their neighbours both drew a clear line between their family and that of their *“criminal and addicted neighbours”*. Ultimately, they all held responsible *“those other kids’ parents”* for not raising them adequately. Something similar occurred when they referred to families who had been excluded from the programme due to non-compliance whom they also *“othered”* and labelled with disvalues such as lazy or not hard workers. These preliminary findings indicated the presence of alienation from others. However, they also evidenced the need for clearer accounts of people’s interactions with society. Thus, a decision was made to include

non-beneficiaries and other type of practitioners during the fieldwork to advance knowledge about the extent to which alienation in poverty affected people's interactions with others. Furthermore, it entailed including questions about symbolic violence and power dynamics within communities and with practitioners. It also meant probing how people socialised, and the layers of those interactions.

Section three of the research instruments, alienation from oneself, illuminated the inner contradictions between hard work and lack of resources. People in both areas demonstrated a strong sense of dignity when talking about their hard work navigating poverty. However, they all felt an "*unexplainable feeling of despair*" and personal failure and to a large extent blamed themselves for not exiting poverty. Originally, this seemed to reflect a contradictory consciousness (Gramsci, 2001) wherein people knew they worked hard yet blamed their laziness for not improving their living conditions. Thus, the decision was made to include more probing in terms of how people navigated poverty, and what type of strategies they deployed to make ends meet and get extra income. Furthermore, it required more probing in terms of how they used their free time and how they perceived it. After analysing the findings of the fieldwork, the contradictory consciousness did not have any bearing in explaining alienation from oneself, as explained in the following section.

The section on alienation from resources underscored the importance of the unequal distribution of people's reduced control over their living conditions. Interviewees talked about how the long distance to the closest health clinic impacted them at different levels (health, time, income); the difficulties accessing goods and services in rural areas and the low quality of products available in urban areas. This restated the importance of the unequal distribution of resources for the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency. Nevertheless, research instruments required specific questions about allocation of and access to goods and services. Furthermore, it required probing on saving strategies, indebtedness and increased cost of life.

The section about the functioning of *Prospera* proved very useful. Interviewees described the type of tasks, responsibilities and functioning of conditionalities. This illuminated the relationship between *Prospera* and the three levels of alienation not previously considered. For instance, people clearly described the cost of the programme in terms of investing time to comply, the type of expenditures attached to the maintenance of the programme or the increased conditionalities over time. Additionally, interviewees provided key insights into the issue of the voluntary tasks (“*faenas*”) and the role of the spokespersons. Therefore, it meant incorporating questions about the socialisation of public activities called “*faenas*” and specific content of workshops and talks. Furthermore, the research instruments required more probing about how those activities worked, with an emphasis on how people negotiated conditionalities and how they used benefits from the programme.

(Appendix 11) shows the original topics that remained after the fieldwork (black), the ones that did not figure in the final research instruments (red) and the topics added after the piloting (blue). Altogether, they aimed to capture the lived experience of people with an emphasis on the material hardships and the relational/symbolic aspects of poverty through the theory of alienation.

The learning from the piloting entailed interviewing 2 promoters during the fieldwork and verifying whether any of the research interviewees had been spokespeople. This meant adjusting research interviews to account for both roles and in particular, their interaction with *Prospera* and with other beneficiaries of that programme (Appendix 12).

To summarise, as a result of the piloting new themes relevant for the research arose. This was the case of the time burden arising from complying with conditionalities, asymmetries of power produced by *Prospera*, and the use of shame as a control tool by government officials and *Prospera* itself. Thus, data yielded during the piloting of the topic guides proved very useful. On the one hand, it highlighted the weaknesses and the missing parts of the drafted theoretical framework, and in

particular the need to strengthen the relation between alienation, needs and agency. On the other hand, it illuminated the contradictions between the said functioning of *Prospera* on paper and the actual functioning on the ground. More specifically, it underscored the actual role of promoters and spokespeople of *Prospera*.

#### **4.5. Conducting fieldwork**

This section explains the fieldwork process. In particular, it clarifies the strategies used to access research participants. It first presents some general considerations about the fieldwork and then goes on to describe the fieldwork process in each of the 4 areas, the difficulties faced and how the research overcame them.

##### *4.5.1. General considerations*

Following the first attempt of analysing the data from the pilot, 2 months' fieldwork took place from 6<sup>th</sup> August to 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2016. This was in the two rural areas of *Milpas* and *Zapotal* and the two urban areas of Mexico City and Xalapa. It covered 46 semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera*, policy makers, practitioners and one researcher as mentioned before.

The conducting of the fieldwork and the piloting required the support of gatekeepers in the forms explained in this section. In particular, it entailed support from two gatekeepers in Mexico City and six gatekeepers in the State of Veracruz (*Milpas*, *Zapotal* and *Xalapa*). All of them were professionals that had direct contact with research participants, knew the context extensively and had lived in the areas for many years. The access to these gatekeepers took place via the researcher's previous professional experience.

As previously discussed, the fieldwork deployed a heterogeneous, purposive and snowball sampling with the intention of testing the extent to which research instruments, in the form of thematic guides, allowed interviewees to provide a comprehensive and accurate account of the themes developed through the theory of

alienation. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours 10 minutes, were voice-recorded, face to face and in most of the cases inside an office or space adapted for the interview. This gave privacy, avoided external disturbance and was in line with data protection standards discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The labour intensive fieldwork entailed sticking to the original plan while at the same time adapting to unforeseen circumstances such as dropouts, cancellations, and last minute changes of schedule. The importance of the learning from the piloting became evident, particularly in terms of navigating the field (Silverman, 2010). However, the particularities of two months' fieldwork in urban and rural areas meant deploying additional resources and using alternative methods such as snowballing recruitment, holding interviews in an open space (2 interviews), and staying in the community to hold early morning interviews.

#### *4.5.2. Milpas*

In the case of the rural area of *Milpas*, gatekeepers supported in the recruitment of some interviewees. However, some of them dropped out at the last minute, and hence snowballing recruitment was key. The tight-knit community facilitated research participants to reach out to other neighbours who were willing to participate, although often on a different date and at a later schedule.

Interviews in *Milpas* took place within the premises of a house that was going through some refurbishment and that was facilitated by gatekeepers. People were highly familiar with this place as it was the house of a senior member of the community as well as a local store that used to sell groceries to students of the primary school located next to it. This proved fundamental not only in terms of gaining trust and easing research participants into the interview process but especially in the depth and quality of information they disclosed.

#### 4.5.3. Zapotal

In the case of the rural area of *Zapotal*, the family ties in the community entailed that, once gaining their trust that the gatekeeper facilitated, research participants opened up to questions relating to very personal feelings, emotions and battles fought to make ends meet. In fact, without that trust the outcomes of this thesis would have not been possible, as evidenced in the analysis of the findings chapters.

In *Zapotal* all interviewees took part because of the support from the gatekeepers and interviews took place within the only primary school of the area. This made it easy for mothers as they were able to participate after taking their children to school, during school times or after picking them up. Furthermore, holding interviews there gave interviewees peace of mind about disclosing personal information and details about their welfare benefits.

#### 4.5.4. Xalapa

In the case of the urban area of Xalapa, the interviewing dynamics differed from the rural ones. The recruitment process was directly through the health care centre and the support of two gatekeepers. Notwithstanding, research participants (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) in that area had less available time and were generally less open to discuss personal feelings. However, they were more open about their criticism of the functioning of *Prospera* and the content and schedules of workshops and talks.

Almost all interviews took place within the premises of the health care clinic. The exceptions were two interviews with beneficiaries held at a safe and quiet place facilitated by gatekeepers nearby the health clinic. Furthermore, health care practitioners of that clinic granted access to a workshop and a talk held within the facilities of the clinic, which proved useful particularly in terms of pitching beneficiaries against each other, as analysed in chapter seven.

The interviews with the two promoters and health care professionals took place also inside the health clinic, whereas the interview with the researcher took place in his office in line with the time and schedule previously arranged via email. Information gathered from these interviews was key in terms of positioning the “*deservingness*” rationale of the programme, and the importance for the programme to train beneficiaries about self-reliance and resilience, which chapter five investigates.

#### 4.5.5. Mexico City

The fieldwork in Mexico City proved more difficult in terms of accessing beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera*. This was the case mainly because of the long distances required to commute, in turn affecting people’s availability for the interviews. Furthermore, delays in public transportation pushed some scheduled interviews to later the same day or to a different occasion, which in turn impacted in the overall interviewing scheduled in that city. Thus, it required a heterogeneous approach to recruitment (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) based on the support of gatekeepers, snowballing and word to mouth support from people acquainted to gatekeepers.

Interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of *Prospera* took place in quiet spaces provided by gatekeepers (i.e. house of a gatekeeper; community events building), although this required adaptation and constant travel given that the interviews were often not even in the same district. In general, people displayed more distrust compared to the other 3 areas, and conflated the questions with attempts to offer them something or get something back in exchange for the interview. This is perhaps not surprising, given the general levels of distrust (INEGI, 2018) coupled with the levels of insecurity (SESNSP, 2018) in the capital city. However, once reaching a certain level of trust via the interviewing process people were more open to discussing problems of social discrimination, symbolic violence, and oppression as well as power abuses in their work place and within their households. This in fact informed the analytical framework and the structural dynamics discussed in chapter five.

Interviews with policy makers took place in their offices at the times and date previously arranged via email. Information obtained from these interviews was key to positioning the idea of success defined in terms of personal achievements with regard to the labour market and the consumption process. Furthermore, it yielded key insights into the success of *Prospera* in alleviating poverty.

Thus, each one of the areas yielded fundamental data for the development of the theoretical framework and the analysis of the findings chapters and ultimately shaped the outcome that is this doctoral thesis. In fact, the process of analysing data and defining themes and concepts was at the same time the process of developing the theory of alienation in its final stage, which in turn reshaped the final analysis in the findings chapters, as discussed in what follows.

## **4.6. Data analysis**

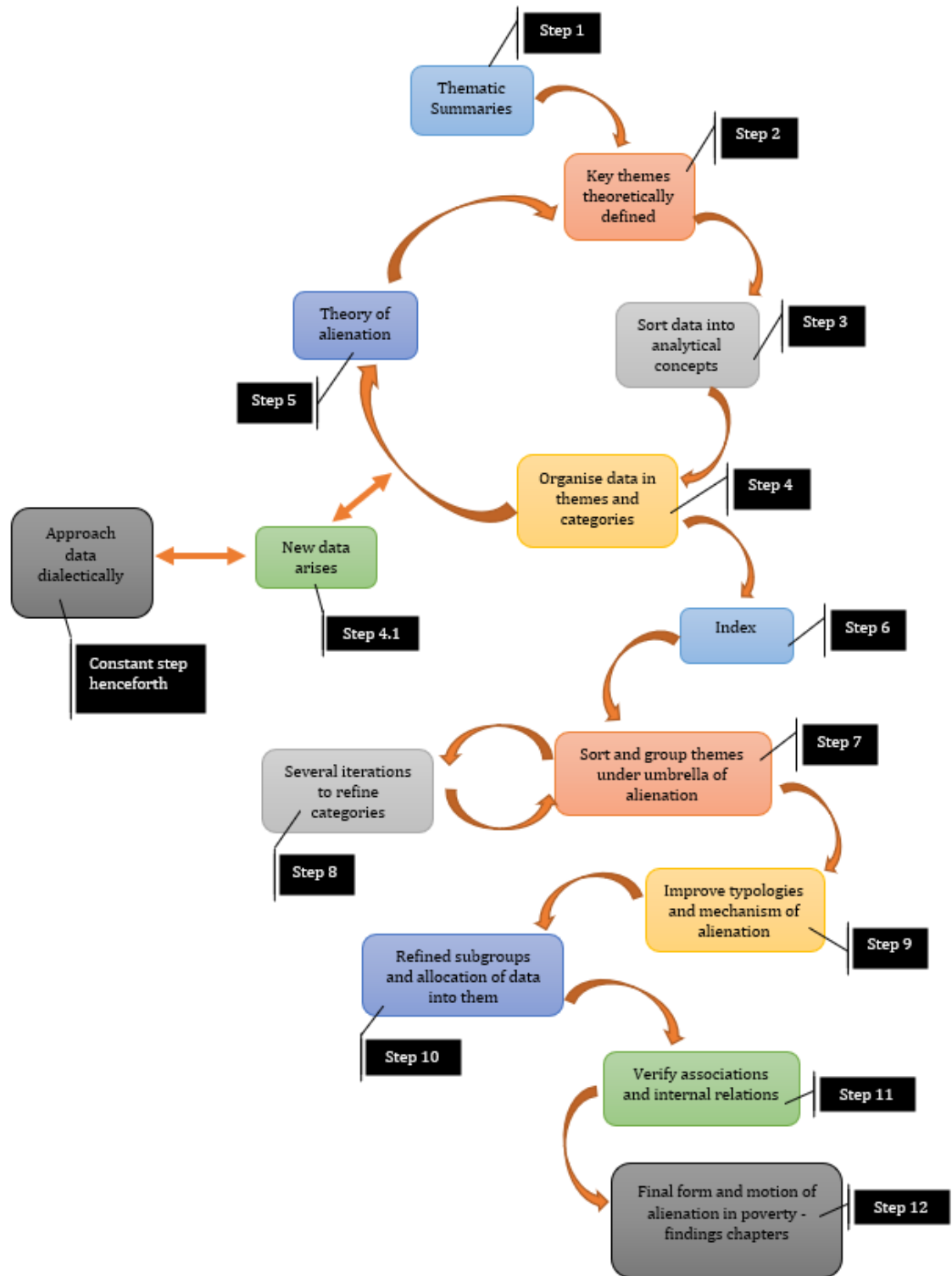
This section details the process followed to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the fieldwork. It clarifies every step taken to classify, code and recode as well as the process of sorting qualitative material, considerations about translation and analysis of interviews. It starts by describing the overarching approach to the analysis of data and explains the steps taken. The second, third and fourth part describe the analysis of alienation from resources, from oneself and from others. Ultimately, this section details how the theory of alienation evolved and informed the analysis of data and how the analysis of data entailed a reconfiguration of the theory of alienation in poverty.

### *4.6.1. Thematic framework analysis*

The analysis of findings took place through twelve steps (Chart 9), using a thematic framework approach to data with the support of Atlas.ti software. This entailed a cyclical process of looking at data dialectically (Appendix 13). That is, focusing on the internal relations and contradictions through the construction of abstracts that ultimately proved fundamental in the reconfiguration of the theory of alienation and the findings chapters as described in what follows.



**Chart 9:** The twelve steps of analysing data



#### 4.6.2. *Analysing alienation from resources*

The analysis of findings was approached dialectically; that is, looking for internal relations and contradictions between themes and categories. In this, the theory indicated the need to focus on issues related to income, expenditure, access to goods and resources and local and household infrastructure. This was key for a first categorisation and grouping of interviewees' recollections into themes.

However, interviewees' account of a life in poverty underscored the importance of day to day negotiations for the satisfaction of needs. Furthermore, their recollections emphasised the importance of inequality to access certain products. This was the case in rural areas when interviewees find it difficult to purchase the food basket that was in turn more expensive if accessed in the local store compared to the closest city. In turn, the concomitant price of traveling to the city pushed the cost up (in terms of transportation and time invested). In the case of urban areas, it entailed a striking difference of quality of goods and services depending on the area where interviewees lived. This was also evident in the quality of health care and education available to them. The differing access to goods and services from rural to urban and within rural and urban areas evidenced the role of the geographically unequal distribution of resources in the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency.

This finding was crucial and in fact helped refine the theory of alienation by shifting the emphasis from mere access to resources to the more nuanced understanding of the circulation of capital. In terms of the theory, it entailed a need to better define the dialectical relation between needs and agency, and the theory of use value. In terms of the analysis, it meant paying attention to the role of *Prospera* in the particularities of the unequal distribution of resources that chapter five analyses.

The theory posited the need to focus on *Prospera's* role in hindering the satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency. It theorised the presence of instances in which completion with conditionalities would negatively interplay with beneficiaries' control over their resources. However, the analysis of findings showed the intricate

contradictory nature of *Prospera*, and in particular the way in which it advanced children's attendance at school and households' attendance for health care, while at the same time hindering people's use of their time and income. This was a key finding that underscored the need to account for the use of time by *Prospera* as a control tool as well as the reduced control over time that beneficiaries had, which in turn further alienated them from their control over their resources, as chapter five analyses.

To summarise, the theory of alienation from resources helped to approach the complex dynamics of poverty and the role of welfare provision. It was important to find its particular manifestations in the fieldwork that people internalised in the form of powerlessness and assault on dignity. However, the analysis of findings represented a reconfiguration of the theory inasmuch as it focused the emphasis on the particular mechanism of unequal distribution of resources. This was essential in the final form of the theory as it supported the putting into motion of the theory through the voices and experiences of interviewees, as analysed in the last part of this section.

#### *4.6.3. Analysing alienation from the self*

From the theoretical point of view, the development of the theory of alienation entailed an initial approximation to the life in poverty, as previously discussed. However, the different iterations of analysis continually developed the content of the theory. In particular, alienation from the self started including household and community dimensions with an emphasis on the contradictions of capital manifested through welfare provision. Accordingly, the dimensions of welfare control in the form of resilience and self-reliance at odds with people's needs and agency became essential.

Findings elsewhere (Pemberton, 2007; Pemberton et al., 2016) showed the presence of contradictory consciousness among people in poverty which influenced its inclusion as a constitutive element of the theory of alienation from the self. However, as a result of the analysis of data, it became evident that it was unsuitable as an explicative tool of the link between the material hardship and the relational/symbolic aspects of poverty. This was because interviewees in this research did not display it.

Accordingly, people recognised their hard work and effort to navigate poverty but none of them perceived themselves as lazy or reckless. This entailed eliminating the initial concept of contradictory consciousness from the analysis and having to determine the actual mechanism of alienation from the self.

The analysis of data was key in that regard. In particular, it meant looking at the contradictions of the circulation of capital in the lived experience of poverty. The ethos of capitalist neoliberalism developed in chapter two became essential. Accordingly, and as per research participants' recollections, the idea of success enacted via socialisation of certain living standards and in particular through the welfare system, arose as a key explanatory tool. People in both urban and rural areas referred to self-reliance and endurance as key elements in exiting poverty and how *Prospera* advanced these qualities via workshops and talks, which evidenced their presence. Therefore, the analysis of findings reconfigured the theory of alienation from the self as it illuminated its specific mechanism: the materially grounded idea of success.

Furthermore, the theory indicated the importance of interviewing practitioners in order to understand how they construed people in poverty and also to capture their ideas and perceptions about what was needed to fight poverty. The analysis of findings confirmed the reproduction of an idea of success in terms of participating in the labour market and the consumption patterns as well as the forms in which they enacted such ideas onto people in poverty. It also confirmed the reaffirmation by practitioners of human capital formation as the cornerstone for people to exit poverty through their own efforts. Furthermore, this set of interviews were paramount in illuminating power dynamics as well as the institutional use of shame, as described in the following section.

To summarise, the original configuration of alienation from the self was vital in the development of the piloting and the fieldwork. In particular, it proved useful to extract the forms in which conditionalities reduced the lack of voice of people in worse off economic conditions and the role of practitioners advancing self-reliance and

resilience as core attitudes people require in order to exit poverty. The analysis of findings proved fundamental in the definition of the mechanism through which alienation from the self operates and the particular forms in which an idea of success has served to reproduce unequal power dynamics and render people in poverty responsible for the structural dynamics of poverty.

#### 4.6.4. *Analysing alienation from others*

With the theory of alienation, it was possible to define the particular forms in which it took place on the ground. In particular, the thematic guides allowed the capturing of the specific power dynamics among beneficiaries, between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and with practitioners. This was essential also for the analysis and in particular for the definition of the material and symbolic construing of poverty.

However, the analysis of data yielded important considerations. For instance, the emphasis shifted from mere power dynamics to the dimensions of space-time variations of capitalist neoliberalism, which were reflected in the differing functioning of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas. In particular, the differing form in which *Prospera* operates from urban to rural areas, reproduced the dynamics of capitalist exploitation inasmuch as people in worse off economic conditions were expected to undertake additional tasks on top of those also present in urban areas, which further reduced their capacity to organise and create fulfilling social relations. Thus, it clarified the form in which *Prospera* has provided a safety net (cash transfer) useful to navigate particularly some very basic needs; however, at the same time, the way it operates has reproduced and in fact increased inequalities.

Furthermore, while the initial conceptual framework described the content of the “*deservingness*” discourse, it gave little attention to how the material world - dialectically related with social dynamics - contoured its content and use. It was after careful revision of data, and constant mirroring with the theoretical approach, that its relevance for the lived experience of poverty became clear. This was in fact a key moment in the development of the thesis as it evidenced the need to strengthen the use

of dialectics as both a method of inquiry and a method of exposition. That is, paying attention to internal relations as much as the contradictions evidenced in the voices and experiences of research participants.

Particularly relevant here was the inclusion of the relationship between non-beneficiaries and beneficiaries of *Prospera*. The theory determined the need to include both types of research participants. The rationale for this was to understand the extent to which social provision impacted social dynamics. The analysis of findings showed that as a result of conditionalities and the functioning of *Prospera* there is a confrontation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. In rural areas, non-beneficiaries perceived beneficiaries as somehow government employees and expected them to sweep the streets and keep the community clean. In turn, beneficiaries felt a lack of empathy and in fact a broken bond with non-beneficiaries, who they perceived as lazy. In urban areas, people in need of government support but without *Prospera*, perceived beneficiaries as scroungers or people who received it because they had a contact in the government. In turn, beneficiaries of *Prospera* referred to those others (people in poverty) as less worthy and lazy. This particular dynamic advanced by *Prospera* reduced social bonding and in fact increased isolation within beneficiaries and between them and non-beneficiaries, as chapter seven analyses.

The inclusion of practitioners was key to illuminating the institutional shaming and symbolic violence deployed by *Prospera* via workshops, programme representatives and practitioners. The theory positioned the importance of interviewing people directly working with beneficiaries to exhibit the type of dynamics generated because of CCT. The analysis of findings confirmed this and advanced the specific forms in which the welfare system shapes people's behaviours, attitudes and aspirations through shaming as a control tool. More specifically, it showed how practitioners and conditionalities worked together to make sure beneficiaries complied and as such prevented them from defying the rules of the programme and its functioning, which in turn reduced the exercise of critical agency socially to fight against a system that increases alienation.

To summarise, the theory of alienation from others was crucial to determine the extent of the material and symbolic construing of poverty that people experienced in the form of humiliation and disrespect. However, the analysis of findings advanced the understanding about the “*deservingness*” discourse, and the institutional use of shaming and symbolic violence by *Prospera* as a control tool.

#### 4.6.5. *Bringing alienation into real motion: final considerations*

The theory of alienation posited here works from the system inwards and then back to the system. This is indeed key as it confronts post-structuralist approaches of defining government performativity in the form of micro-practices of control that “*shape, sculpt, mobilise and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups*” (Dean, 1999: 12). In contrast, this theory of alienation in poverty built from the philosophy of internal relations and the process of abstraction through dialectics explains the contradictory dynamics of governmental structures against the lived experiences of poverty. In particular, the focus on capital-neoliberalism in the form of welfare provision allows us to surpass the logical temptation of understanding structural forces as mere forms of control. In turn, this permits explanation of the case of the lived experience of research participants and their material benefits coming from direct cash transfers, while also investigating how CCT programmes are at odds with their material living conditions and relational experience of poverty.

To put in motion the theory of alienation entailed a careful selection and rejection of certain categories and themes discussed by research participants. For instance, not included were some of the core themes that matter to interviewees such as internal and external migration, crime, corruption, debt and bereavement. Albeit important, these topics did not figure centre stage in the theory of alienation for one main reason: while these topics relate to poverty, the set of internal relations within them differed from the inner processes of poverty. For instance, the issue of debt while related to poverty contained its own dynamics related to financial capital and reflected

contradictions with regard to access to resources. Therefore, the inclusion of debt in chapter five is from the vantage point of resources and its role vis-à-vis conditionalities and not from financial capital, its natural vantage point. Similarly, migration, while also related to poverty, occurred mainly as an “*escape valve*” of younger generations. Therefore, general references to it serve the purpose of contextualising the day-to-day lives of beneficiary women who struggled to make ends meet.

Parallel to the processes of sorting, classifying and indexing data it was essential to pay attention to nuances, differences and in particular deviant cases. In fact, the presence of deviant cases during the fieldwork and detected in the analysis of data was key for the validation of research findings. Experiences of research participants that did not initially seem to fit the theoretical framework heavily informed the theory of alienation as it currently stands. This occurred for instance when analysing symbolic power which some research participants justified or deployed against other people. This insight lent itself to the theory on how, from the vantage point of beneficiary women, symbolic power has become a tool to gain government recognition through “*othering*” and shaming other beneficiaries, which in turn reduced the power of the beneficiaries on the receiving end. However, from the vantage point of welfare provision, that same symbolic power has become a control tool of welfare provision by for instance pitching beneficiaries against each other, as chapter seven investigates.

Findings from the pilot were part of the analysis. This was because while some of the probing and prompts changed after the piloting there were no fundamental issues with the data collection in that process. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews gave flexibility and as such there was no prescribed schedule, which gave scope to research participants to elaborate about their lived experience of poverty and their dealings with *Prospera*.

The theory of alienation informed the design and content of the research instruments. These were done in English for approval from supervisors and the ethical committee of the University of Birmingham. However, the interviews were conducted



in Spanish, which required the research instruments to be translated into Spanish. The analysis of findings required a first approximation in Spanish to extract quotes in the original language and follow the thematic framework analysis previously described. Thus, the first step entailed categorising and coding in Spanish. However, as the themes and categories evolved so did the analysis of quotes in English, which in turn required translation of quotes from Spanish (researcher's mother tongue) into English. The following section discusses the ethical considerations of this process.

The use of dialectics as a method of inquiry has entailed theorising and analysing internal relations by using theoretical abstracts, which in turn gained nuanced significance through the findings and their subsequent analysis. Thus, the type of generalisations reached through the analysis of data corresponded to what has been called theory building (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Accordingly, this process entailed the testing of theoretical propositions for a more general application, but with the characteristic of requiring further empirical inquiry in order to refine it. That is to say, a theory in a flux, rather than a fixed and immutable construction of universal application (Kaplan, 1964), a flux of the sort developed throughout this doctoral thesis.

Finally, the reliability and validity of data achieved was a result of the robust evidence provided by research participants, and not from the extent to which the sample was statistically representative of the population. This was because generalisation of qualitative research comes from the extent to which research captured the different experiences of poverty, and not from a statistical basis. As such, reliability understood as sustainable findings and validity understood as a properly grounded research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) characterised the development of this dissertation.

To summarise, the final form of the theory of alienation with its three levels of alienation from resources, alienation from the self, and alienation from others, was a result of mirroring theory and findings. More specifically, the development of the theory of alienation entailed a cyclical process. The first approach to a theory of

alienation framed the development of research instruments used to approach reality. The preliminary findings of the pilot study in turn informed both the content of fieldwork research findings and the scope of the theory of alienation. Then, the theory of alienation framed the first iteration of analysing fieldwork findings which in turn shaped the content of the theory of alienation. This cyclical process of developing theory and analysing findings required several iterations throughout a period of one and a half years and stopped once the findings and theory matched the explanatory capacity of the theoretical apparatus. The actual content of the theoretical chapter and the three findings chapters also reflect this cyclical dynamic, inasmuch as while the theory chapter presents the theory of alienation in poverty, the findings chapters put it into motion. In fact, this process echoes Marx's endeavour of developing a theory that aims firstly to reflect social dynamics within capitalism as closely as possible as an image in a mirror (Marx, 1904) and secondly to explain them dialectically.

#### **4.7. Ethical considerations**

Gaining ethical approval for this thesis was a pre-condition for undertaking both the pilot and the fieldwork. Research involving people as research participants entails ethical considerations. Accordingly, the core issues dealt with were those related to avoiding harm; informed consent, confidentiality and data protection. Additionally, given the geographical location of this research, interviews were in Spanish while the analysis was in English, requiring important considerations around translation, meaning making and interpretation of subtleties (Silverman, 2010), as described in what follows.

##### *4.7.1. Avoiding harm*

Harm in social research can relate to aspects such as physical or emotional harm, hampering a research participant's development or putting them on the bench of reprehensible behaviours. Accordingly, it is essential to *"anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful"*

(Bryman, 2012: 136). As such, and as addressed in what follows, issues of data protection and confidentiality became paramount to the anticipation of potential harm.

Gatekeepers helped in the identification of potential risk that could have arisen from conducting research. Accordingly, interviews in rural areas took place in the local school which granted both certainty to interviewees as well as security to the researcher. Thus, establishing harm-avoidance strategies was a result of a collaborative work with gatekeepers, as detailed in what follows.

Avoiding transportation risks for research participants and the researcher in the state of Veracruz entailed holding interviewees in public schools and health care centres. However, in Mexico City, given its size, interviews took place in public places such as quiet restaurants and surroundings of public spaces. Transportation provided by gatekeepers in their private vans also reduced difficulties in reaching communities or facing distrust as an outsider from the community on the road to the rural areas. Furthermore, interviews took place during office hours, that is from 9 am to 7 pm, which reduced the risk of facing the crime that usually increases at dawn.

*In situ* risk avoidance entailed holding interviews in public or open spaces. According to gatekeepers, parents felt more confident and safer talking within schools or health care centres' premises. In fact, mothers showed more willingness to talk about their household needs and personal lives in those public spaces. Furthermore, this reduced potential harm to the researcher that might have resulted from being alone at participants' households. Additionally, undertaking interviews at one place reduced risk of walking alone within and across communities. In addition, in order to reduce possible harm that could have arisen during the interviews, there was a continuous contact with gatekeepers at the beginning and the end of every working day.

Furthermore, avoiding potential psychological distress from research participants entailed considering people's feelings and emotions in order to try and reduce psychological harm (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Notwithstanding, some research

interviewees shared sensitive information about physical abuse in their localities and by family members. To handle those cases, the researcher suggested psychological and legal advice through the gatekeepers who had access to facilities and support from public and private institutions. Notwithstanding, none of the participants were experiencing violence at that moment of their lives nor showed any signs of trying to cause self-harm and as such there was no need to seek immediate support. Furthermore, the interviews followed high standards of research as per the University of Birmingham and Mexican Ministry of Education's regulations.

#### *4.7.2. Informed consent, confidentiality and data protection*

To access research participants meant gaining direct, voluntary and explicit consent. This took place before the research interview via oral explanation of their involvement in this project, what was expected from them, the typical length of an interview and confirming their voluntary participation (no incentives of any form involved). Additionally, it entailed giving participants a consent form (which they signed) with a clear and transparent account of the scope, confidentiality, processing and use of their data, and opportunity to withdraw from this research project at any point and up to one year after the interviews. Furthermore, this entailed advising interviewees about the handling of their personal information and the steps taken to guarantee that it was kept confidential at all times.

Accordingly, to file all personal data meant using throughout the entirety of this research project an encrypted storage unit, with anonymised aliases and handled with the highest research standards (BSA, 2017). Furthermore, the presentation of findings and analysis evidenced in chapters four, five and six guaranteed anonymity of research participants, which will be also the case for any future publication resulting from this doctoral research.

Similarly, to secure all physical documentation containing personal data of research participants entailed using a locked drawer accessible only to the researcher. As per the ethical review process, the plan is to destroy all the physical information 6

months after the *viva voce*. In addition, following the commitment to an ethical review process, the plan is to erase all personal data stored, on a safe hard drive, after 6 years of submitting this PhD thesis. Furthermore, transcripts of anonymous interviews might be archived for other researchers to use if additional resources become available to store them online. Finally, although this research has not been involved in the manipulation of chemicals or direct use of natural resources, to reduce the researcher's CO2 footprint the printing of materials has been avoided at all times unless strictly necessary for the conduction of piloting and fieldwork.

#### 4.7.3. Translation

The process of translation entails a creative process similar to that of doing research. In fact, carrying out qualitative research requires a process of translation in different ways. This is the case for instance with coding *“which subordinates two different instances of speech or other data under the same category [that] constitutes translation and presupposes a referent... from the perspective of which two different things become or can be taken as the same”* (Wolff-Michael, 2013: 21). In this process, as well as with translation from one language into another, the researcher aims to find patterns in the data that in turn is a process of abstraction and as such a process of translating data into the researcher's language. Similarly, in the case of translation and doing qualitative research together, accuracy requires a theoretical as well as a practical endeavour of constant iterations of analysing data. It entails making sense of data and translating it into the researchers' language (the theory) but via a second layer of a meaning-making process from a mother tongue (in this case Spanish) to a second language (English) and then back into a researcher's language (theory).

It entails a recognition of the inaccuracy of the concept of *“perfect translation”* that comes from a metaphysical ideology, in which translation can take place without decision and choice and can be algorithmically produced (Wolff-Michael, 2013). On the contrary, recognising the creative process of analysis is a call to approach the process of translation in social sciences as the process of doing qualitative research. That is to

say, a recognition that both produce something novel rather than simply a perfect rendering of the original source, but at the same time maintaining the accuracy of context and meaning of that original source.

This is the form in which this thesis approached the process of translation. In other words, a recognition of the impact that translation had on the original phrasing to fit expressions into English that made sense while at the same time making sure that despite changes in phrasing the content stayed true to the meaning as conveyed by research participants. Therefore, this creative process of translating and undertaking qualitative research did not entail fitting people's voices into the theory, but rather let the voices of interviewees speak through the theory and findings.

The above process was essential to make sure the voices of interviewees were centre stage, and furthermore to assure their experiences of poverty and of *Prospera* informed the content of the three findings chapters and ultimately the form of the theory of alienation in poverty which is the focus of the following three chapters.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter developed the methodology behind this doctoral thesis. Accordingly, it presented justifications for the steps taken and methods selected based on research, literature review, research questions and purposes. In particular, it thoroughly explained the decisions and processes behind each stage of research that the content of all chapters reflect. It first positioned this thesis ontologically and epistemologically. The second section discussed the research design. It developed the process behind the literature review of *Prospera* and its importance for the development of an overarching narrative. The following section justified the selection of a case study research design. The third section explained the design of the methods. It developed the sampling and recruitment process and then explained the design and implications of the topic guide per research participant. The fourth section described the pilot interviews with reflections about the data obtained. The fifth section detailed the conducting of the

fieldwork. It presented some general considerations, and then clarified the process in each one of the four areas chosen. The sixth section explained the process of data analysis. It first detailed the steps taken to carry out a thematic framework analysis and then detailed the analysis of findings per each one of the three typologies of alienation, and then presented some final considerations. The last section clarified the ethical elements taken into account in this thesis. It explained the measures taken to avoid harm, and the steps taken to get informed consent, guarantee confidentiality and protection of data of research participants and finally explained implications about translation. Ultimately, this chapter is fundamental in defining the boundaries, scope, extent and implications of the research process as well as the methodological decisions behind this doctoral thesis.

## Chapter V Alienation from resources and socially available opportunities

*“Well maybe to know how to get more money right? Like cooking and selling the food... but in a way you lock out yourself from the world with two little girls, that you have to do everything at home, and that you never get prepared and that you put everything on hold for your husband that will bring it [money] to the house... and maybe because I don't have the time, because all the time is about this and that, and so many things I have to do...”*  
Eliza, rural area

### Introduction

This chapter starts the analysis of findings by bringing forward a critical appraisal of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico that started with the CCT programme *Prospera* in 1997. It brings a key reassertion of Marxist approaches as a form of resisting government dynamics of domination, doing this via the re-interpretation of CCT programmes through the lens of the material and relational symbolic experience of poverty. In so doing, the three findings chapters will put in motion the theory of alienation applied to a life in poverty using the experiences and voices of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the social programme *Prospera* in urban and rural areas of Mexico.

The argument of this chapter is that the purpose of *Prospera* to train its beneficiaries through conditionalities coupled with the local dynamics it produces, alienates people from their resources and opportunities. Alienation from socially available resources and opportunities thus understood means a material impossibility to decide about the use and access to resources, which hinders the satisfaction of needs and the realisation of agency. Thus, this chapter directly answers the research question: *In what ways does Prospera hinder the satisfaction of needs for its recipients in terms of their resources and opportunities?* To that end it shows how the mechanism of geographically unequal distribution of resources forces powerlessness onto people and assaults their dignity.



The core analysis of this chapter focuses on how *Prospera* as a form of welfare provision mirrors the contradictory nature of capitalism inasmuch as it stands in contradiction to the satisfaction of people's needs and realisation of agency. That is to say, *Prospera*, while increasing the income of households, also alienates beneficiaries from their economic resources; while it reduces the time spent to make an income, it alienates beneficiaries from their time; and while it facilitates access to health and education, it alienates households that are struggling the most to satisfy their basic needs. This chapter starts by investigating the tensions of accessing work (formal and informal) with the type of conditions requested by *Prospera*. The analysis shows how the ethos of conditionalities is at odds with the work of recipients of the programme. It then shows that while *Prospera* provides a bimonthly stipend to its beneficiaries, which generates some economic relief, its demands for compliance negatively affect the income of households. Additionally, it investigates how *Prospera's* differing demands from urban to rural areas have increased the burden on beneficiary women with a particularly negative effect on single mothers, women in paid employment and households with an elderly member or children with disability at home. Then it analyses the relationship between access to material resources with the use and disposal of time at work, household and leisure. The last section discusses the implications for the theory of alienation.

### **5.1. Work**

This section begins the analysis of alienation from resources and opportunities experienced by beneficiaries of *Prospera*. It starts by investigating the tensions of local labour dynamics, relating them with the contradictions of the circulation of capital between urban and rural areas, the satisfaction of needs and the rationale of escaping poverty through the ladder of education upheld by *Prospera*. In particular, it analyses how the functioning of *Prospera* mirrors inequalities from urban to rural areas that exacerbate the personal experience of poverty where beneficiaries are trapped on the "low wage work-household work" cycle. It builds on the literature on capital circulation

(Harvey, 2003; 2014) to illuminate the contradictions experienced at the individual level in urban and rural Mexico.

#### 5.1.1. Labour demands and distribution of jobs

The main argument driving the functioning of *Prospera* for the past two decades is that through their work – which will allegedly provide them higher income and as such allow them to become more active consumers in the market – “*the poor*” will eventually exit poverty. *Prospera* targets its support by life cycles and gender, as analysed in chapter one. Thus, it argues, there is a need to increase the human capital particularly of children and young adults of school age through access to the educational ladder, nutrition and health care. The aim of the bimonthly stipend that it provides to recipients of the programme is to reduce the incentives of income from child labour so that parents send their children to school instead of to harvest, fishing or any other low-waged job in the informal sector. By having more disposable income, parents will then invest more income in their children’s health, nutrition and education. Additionally, because individuals, – especially “*the poor*” – often waste money on “*booze*”, tobacco and other unhealthy and unnecessary products, *Prospera* conditions its support on certain behaviours (attending talks, workshops, and health checks). The goal of those conditions is to train its beneficiaries in healthier and more productive patterns of behaviour. With these incentives and constraints, *Prospera* has aimed to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

However, the reality of the four areas researched (two urban and two rural) contradicts the core assumption of *Prospera* that people can escape poverty through their hard work in the labour market. In the four areas studied people lacked access to stable jobs. Women were particularly vulnerable, and married women constantly saw themselves as - and in fact were - materially dependent on men’s income. Additionally, they commonly worked or engaged only in sporadic paid activities: washing neighbours’ clothes, cleaning houses, taking care of neighbours’ children and selling food. Both men and women lacked working benefits, unemployment insurance or

pension. Additionally, most of them did not have a contract, were self-employed or worked on a casual basis.

While interviewees had a variety of jobs, there were certain trends per area. In both rural areas studied, jobs were mainly in the direct exploitation of natural resources. In the rural area of *Milpas* all parents were fishers. Many women either sporadically fished with the men or sold fish. In the rural area of *Zapotal* most parents were farmers. Some worked as drivers, or assistants of landowners and most women were homemakers with little to no income.

In both urban areas studied, people commonly worked in the direct provision of services: selling street food, working in retail, driving taxis, and working on construction, among others. Women engaged in diverse economic activities often related to selling goods and services. However, these trends are not exhaustive lists of jobs in the areas, but reflections of a system incapable of providing decent employment and living conditions to a great number of households. Thus, the inner dynamics of the labour market negatively interplayed with how people negotiated poverty. For Betty, from *Mexico City*, despite having a degree in Translation, those limited opportunities meant moving from one unstable job into another. As she described at length:

*"I went to work in a printing workshop [with her aunt] but it was piecework. So we would work to the point of exhaustion, so much that at times we didn't even get any sleep. We didn't earn much, sometimes we got \$1,200 a week [around £52]... Then I worked at 'Super-Che' [food chain] where I worked 8 months having to leave my child at home, but the wage was too little, \$1,500 every other week [around £65] so you have to limit yourself real bad... Then when I moved in with my husband we started a street food business selling 'tamales' [Mexican traditional dish made of corn-based dough]... He was unemployed so we started selling 'tamales'... The only disadvantage is that you have to go by foot, walking and walking long distances, and like it or not, it is a very tiring job. Then when I was pregnant, because I couldn't be moving a lot, we opted out of that and my husband had to get a job at a construction site... But I*

*don't like being here locked in... So, I do all sort of things, like teaching English, but I don't charge them much because I understand the situation of mothers. Sometimes I charge them \$20 per hour, so you earn \$20 [around £0.85] or \$40 [around £1.70] so you can buy a box of eggs, and you go on purchasing groceries... I also still make imitation jewellery... and I still sell it at the street market and the little I earn is useful right?" Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

Betty's account highlights how poverty and unstable jobs relate to how people make ends meet. The recollections of Betty neatly summarise what interviewees constantly had to go through to navigate poverty, make a living and subsist. In particular, her words underscore the form individual agency takes in the labour market that entails constant efforts and hard work despite the limited availability of jobs, wages below the minimum and a life of bare subsistence. Yet, *Prospera* insists, beneficiaries are capable of exiting poverty through their own hard work and effort. Nevertheless, similar to the case of Betty, the life of Vicky has been characterised by uncertainty, from when her father was selling clothes on the streets when she was young until now as an adult with her own three children. She struggles to make ends meet as a housewife largely because her household's income is uncertain:

*"My husband's job is very, you know, he is a bricklayer, he works as a plumber, doing all sort of house maintenance jobs, and that's how we survive really. And yeah, like they say at times the situation can be, well, sometimes there isn't any work and we have our children and sometimes there isn't enough to cover the expenses..." Vicky, non-beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Vicky depict the complexities that interviewees, particularly in urban areas, experienced navigating the labour market as well as the constant labour insecurity experienced in both urban and rural areas. Accordingly, the labour reforms in Mexico that started in the 1980s in an attempt to free the labour market from state control, have increased the precariousness of employment as is the case with zero-hours and temporary contracts, legalisation of outsourced employment, and increased

retirement age, among others (Solís, et al., 2011). The de-regulation of the labour market as part of the neoliberalisation process in that country has represented a deterioration in the living conditions of the worse off. Not only are people alienated from opportunities in the labour market, but in its interaction with a life in poverty this situation relates to alienation from socially available assets, in which *Prospera* has been key, as analysed in what follows.

To be sure, the cases of Betty and Vicky are reflections of how interviewees faced the labour dynamics in urban areas. In particular, their life trajectories are reflections of the inner relation of labour and poverty. Additionally, their stories emphasise the contradictions of capital that people in poverty experienced in the form of powerlessness, shame and reduced power to counter exploitation, as this and the following chapters analyse. Nevertheless, the logic of *Prospera* rests on attributing to personal will a power over the labour market that is capable of balancing the accumulated inequalities experienced in poverty. As analysed in chapter three, this one-sided understanding of poverty mirrors the logic of the neoliberal subject (Chandler, 2016), inasmuch as it trains its beneficiaries to become self-reliant, adaptive but constantly insecure.

All research interviewees explained how the place of residence and the distribution of resources in society condition the types of jobs available. That is to say, labour dynamics adjust to market demands and in particular, they interplay with inequalities that are more acute in the urban-rural divide (de la Rocha, 2010), regardless of personal will or hard work. Thus, there were sharp differences between urban and rural jobs, between formal and informal types of activities and as such, there were differences in how beneficiaries of *Prospera* negotiated conditionalities with their limited available resources and satisfied their needs. For Lorena, who lives in the rural area of *Zapotal*, access to land allows her to grow some vegetables for self-consumption:

*Lorena* Here we sow corn, beans, peas, courgettes, gourds, peaches, pears. But sometimes they just don't grow, we sow them but they don't grow...

*Gerardo* Do you have a big land?

*Lorena* No, it is really small, although we have a plot down there... we sow everything... but because of the weather conditions now they won't grow

*Gerardo* And what do you do in those occasions when things won't grow?

*Lorena* We have to go out and buy those things for consumption...

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Lorena are a clear manifestation of the difficulties of rural poverty. In particular, her words emphasise how the limited resources to invest in her small plot of land impede her from selling her products on the market, as a result of which her household relies on self-consumption to alleviate some of their needs, although as she mentioned, that is often not enough. Largely, this is a result of the rapid profit-making derived from speculative investments for food production via land grabbing<sup>69</sup>. A residue of this has been a growing pressure on small farmers, who stand little chance of competing with the market dynamics of the global food chain. As such, the dynamics of capital circulation directly interplay with households' micro-management of resources, which interviewees referred to in the form of lack of jobs, meagre wages, lack of infrastructure and labour insecurity. Accordingly, "*alienation extends beyond the economy so that also the state and ideology alienate humans from the conditions of collective, political decision-making and cultural meaning-making*" (Fuchs, 2018: 456). The objective-subjective relationship of alienation entails a material

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<sup>69</sup> To a large extent, the situation experienced by people in rural areas relates with the process of capital circulation embedded in agriculture. A particular example of this is the land grabbing and land exploitation of a food production system hoarded by transnational firms and encouraged by international donors such as the World Bank as an alleged solution to fight food shortages worldwide (WB, 2005). According to the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations, Oliver De Shutter, from 2006 15 to 20 million hectares have been subject to negotiations with foreign investors, which represents 10% of the Mexican territory (OHCHR, 2012).

separation and loss of control over the structures that make up their lives which people experienced in the form of powerlessness and assault on dignity among others, as analysed in what follows.

For Angy, who lives in a rural area, the lack of jobs in the area entailed working as a self-employed houseworker. To make ends meet, she cleaned other people's houses, a very common job in the community:

*"Once I get to my work I start sweeping and sweeping and so on and I don't stop until I finish. But she [her boss] tells me stop for a moment because the heat outside is very intense. 'Isn't the sun hurting you right now?' she asks, and I say, 'Yeah, I'm dizzy by the sun now.' 'So move to the side, drink some water and freshen up a bit,' she says; and so then I continue until I finish..." Angy, beneficiary, rural area*

The recollections of Angy regarding a usual day at work resonate with the lived experience of all research participants in rural areas: low wages and unstable jobs, often under physically strenuous conditions. Angy's options for alternative jobs are in fact limited to this type of low salary occupation, as was the case in all four areas researched.

In both urban and rural areas, a characteristic of the experience of research participants was low wage jobs with no chances of flourishing. Furthermore, this type of job represented a lifetime of income below the minimum, as well as repetitive work under dangerous or exhausting working conditions that alienated them from their control over their resources and opportunities to develop their critical agency and to expand their personal skills and talents. Under those conditions work stops being a productive activity and in turn becomes a subsistence endeavour and as such it loses its potential for self-realisation. As a result, interviewees lost control over the satisfaction of their needs and realisation of critical agency.

Notwithstanding, the most important anti-poverty measure in Mexico holds people responsible for exiting poverty and it advocates this on a monthly basis, by training beneficiaries in self-reliance, adaptation and compliance via workshops, talks and health clinic visits that actually harm people in poverty. Additionally, as it will become clear throughout the following chapters, *Prospera* has been pivotal in advancing inequalities and the self-reliance logic of neoliberalism.

### 5.1.2. Competing demands

Most of research interviewees brought in some money to their homes. Nevertheless, the competing demands between complying with *Prospera* and satisfying household needs further reduced interviewees' control over their living conditions. Those performing a regular activity in the labour market who were also beneficiaries of the *Prospera* programme struggled the most to keep up with conditionalities. Lupe is one of the two bakers where she lives, and has been a baker for over two decades. She has three children, and while she appreciates the support she gets from the programme, attending all the workshops, talks and health clinic visits is overwhelming. As she put it:

*“The conditionalities affect me a lot. There were times that I was so desperate, and the meetings are always at 12 in the afternoon, the workshops at 10 in the morning and I had to figure it out; it affected me because as I’m telling you I bake bread and those are the times when I make bread so it really affected me, because I can’t sell...”*  
*Lupe, beneficiary, rural area*

Lupe exemplified the mismatch between her personal circumstances and the demands of *Prospera*, a mismatch that was reproduced across the recollections of all interviewees who had a job, or who had an elderly person or a relative with disability at home, and those whose access to infrastructure made it more difficult to comply with all the conditions. What is more, the words of Lupe are a reflection of interviewees' frustrations towards a system that is increasingly demanding of them while decreasingly able to provide them with good health care and education.



Similarly, Mary, from a capital city, struggles to organise her schedule around conditionalities. Interestingly, she works as a cleaner at a health clinic of *Prospera*. She is a beneficiary and often finds herself cleaning while the workshops or talks are taking place. Yet, because her health clinic is a different one, the programme will not allow her to attend those talks and workshops taking place at her work place. Instead, *Prospera* requires that she attend the health clinic closer to her house, which is over one hour away from her work place. Additionally, she cannot transfer her health clinic affiliation to where she works, because that depends on her home postal code. When asked about what complying with conditionalities meant to her, she said:

*“Attending the talks and the workshops is difficult because my schedule starts at noon. But the programme events are all during the morning and I don’t have the time to get there. Then, sometimes it is 9 am and the talk hasn’t even started and finishes at around 1:30 [pm] or 2:00 [pm] and I already have to be here by then. What I mean is that it is not possible for me to be there at that time, do you get me? If they were at 8 am then yes, I would probably have time, but also having to leave and rush, half way through the talk...”* Mary, beneficiary, urban area

The case of Mary illustrates the inflexibility of *Prospera* towards beneficiaries’ needs. What is more, the words of Mary underline the difficulties of complying with conditionalities and being a single mother with a job. While the programme constantly encouraged mothers to get a job and praised work as fundamental to escaping poverty, it had little consideration for the needs of those who had one. For Luisa the inflexibility of *Prospera* has had a particularly negative effect on working women who struggle to navigate the intricacies of *Prospera* while also trying to provide for their households:

*“A lot of people have their jobs, and can’t be asking for time off every time. Some are more affected than others, particularly those who go to work...”* Louisa, beneficiary, rural area

The words of Louisa emphasise the inadequacy of a welfare provision that rests on the surveillance of people's behaviour as a control tool to alleviate poverty. Similarly, for Mafe who lives in a rural area, the clash between her work and the programme's requisites increases the levels of stress she is already experiencing, which ultimately jeopardises her chances of staying on the programme. As she put it:

*"What I say is that for one who works they should give us the opportunity of attending [the talks, health clinic visits and workshops] when we are more available... and honestly, they told us that if we had a job that was great... But if they are removing us from the programme, then what kind of support is that? I mean, I think that is not of any help. Now, I can't take my children to the health clinic except the days I rest [which are] either Saturday or Sunday. But then neither Sundays nor Saturdays is there any service in the Maraboto [health clinic] because it is closed..."*  
*Mafe, beneficiary, rural area*

The explanation of Mafe reflects a commonality among health clinics, particularly in small towns and rural areas where they are not open during the weekends. Not only does this jeopardise people's access to health care, but it also impedes working mothers from complying with conditionalities on more suitable schedules. This hinders their control over their time and ultimately affects their access to health, as analysed later on this chapter.

Lupe, Maria and Mafe are three out of many mothers in Mexico who are employees and need the programme. As beneficiaries, they have been able to maintain it for some years, despite the fact that all of them have had deductions from their benefits for non-compliance. Yet not only has the programme not taken any serious steps to account for those who work, but it has also tightened up conditionalities over the years with little to no regards for people's needs. During an interview, Dr. James, a researcher specialist on *Prospera*, put it clearly:

*“[Because of] the organisational autonomy [of Prospera] the bureaucrats... end up winning as always purely because they control the processes and so there is no impediment for the workshops and meetings to be held at night, or during the evenings, when people are back from work... so everything adapts to the personnel of Prospera who work from Monday to Friday during working hours, which coincides with the working schedule of women that work...” James, Researcher*

The words of Dr James attest to the unequal power relations between government officials and welfare recipients, as chapter seven fully analyses. In particular, his words highlight how the bureaucratic functioning of *Prospera* takes precedence over the needs of the very people it aims to support. This resonates with research around welfare recipients in the UK (McKenzie, 2015) and their interaction with government authorities that highlights the negative impact of bureaucratic procedures (Watts et al., 2018), surveillance (Fletcher, 2018) and sanctions (Johnsen, 2018; Fletcher and Wright, 2018) on the satisfaction of welfare recipients’ needs. Beneficiaries faced a constant struggle between complying with *Prospera* and satisfying their households’ needs, which people experienced in the form of uncertainty and insecurity: a constant state of insecurity about whether they would be able to get a leave of absence from work for the next workshop or talk; and conversely insecurity about whether next time they would either get a deduction from *Prospera* or their wage.

This state of insecurity predisposes beneficiaries to being more resilient and to adapt to the constant climate of change characteristic of capitalism. *Prospera* mirrors this feature of capitalism by requiring its beneficiaries to constantly adapt and navigate conditionalities. As evidenced by research participants, the “reward-punishment” logic behind *Prospera* further adds to that state of insecurity. Thus, *Prospera* uses insecurity to “re-wire” beneficiaries, often at the expense of people’s needs, work and time.

Furthermore, this state of insecurity nurtures people’s dispositions for compliance. As will become clearer throughout this and the following chapters, imposing on people that constant state of insecurity (through talks, workshops, and

socialisation of certain values, aspirations and ideas) fulfils a broader project of setting people's mental and physical disposition towards a neoliberal type of agency characterised by resilience, adaptation, self-reliance and vulnerability (Chandler, 2016).

What is more, the logic of inflexible conditionalities behind *Prospera* has pushed beneficiaries that require an income to survive into a "low wage work-household work"<sup>70</sup> cycle, as explained by Ruth when she referred to the difficulties of accommodating her household chores, *Prospera* and work:

*"I stopped working..., but because I just can't find a fixed job because of all the things like picking up the children, taking them here and there, and if there is a meeting or anything from the programme or if anything else is needed, it is not easy to find a fixed job because all jobs are regularly from 9 am to 3 pm and I can't at those times so I have not been able to look for a job based on schedules, so I have been helping some people [cleaning houses, caring for children and elderly] and that is how we are surviving..." Ruth, beneficiary, urban area*

Ruth's recollection of how she has navigated poverty through a constant arrangement of her time between working, complying with *Prospera* and being a housewife reflects the multiplicity of paid and unpaid activities that interviewees in both urban and rural areas accommodated in their schedules to make a living. In particular, her words bring to the fore the inadequacy of conditionalities to beneficiaries who in order to comply are often trapped in a cycle of formal and informal paid activities coupled with household chores that pushes them further away from the control of their living conditions.

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<sup>70</sup> This approach contrasts with the "low pay-no pay" cycle approach (Hendra et al., 2015) that on the one hand renders invisible non-remunerated efforts and time spent particularly on household and caring responsibilities and on the other misses the structural constraints behind the formal-informal labour dynamics of capital circulation. Thus, the focus here aims to put forward an approach that reflects the multiplicity of activities that people resort to in order to make a living and that are essential for the reproduction of society, putting the role of women at the forefront in that regard.

*Prospera* rests almost exclusively on mothers, and this perpetuates gender roles in society that, together with *Prospera's* inflexible conditionalities, reinforce also the gendered dynamics of labour in both urban and rural areas, as explained by Amalia from a capital city:

*Amalia*        *I think that to get ahead [I would need] there to be jobs, so we could work. If only there were jobs for women... there is barely any job for women...*

*Gerardo*       *And which are the jobs for women and which ones the jobs for men?*

*Amalia*        *That they build more houses that need cleaning...*

*non- beneficiary, urban area*

While Amalia highlights a key element of a life in poverty, discussed previously -lack of jobs - her words also point to how the socialisation of expected gender roles has permeated her perception of self-worth in the labour market and ultimately her private life, all of which is directly and indirectly promoted by *Prospera*. The programme does this directly via the workshops, talks, community actions ("*faenas*"), and health clinic visits that reproduce traditional values around caring and household chores, as further analysed in chapter six. Additionally, it does this indirectly, when its inflexible conditionalities combine with the constant insecurity and advance the trap of the "*low wage work-household work*" cycle, thus promoting the gendered exploitation of the labour market.

The words of research participants reflect the particular forms in which capitalism has subsumed patriarchy, in this case through the labour market. Furthermore, their recollections underscore how *Prospera* has become pivotal in the reproduction of capitalist exploitation by way of pushing beneficiaries into low wage jobs, often in the informal sector.

### 5.1.3. Relevance to alienation

Be it in urban or rural areas, *Prospera* reproduces the dynamics of capital exploitation insofar as the state of uncertainty and insecurity it advances onto its beneficiaries, predisposes people towards compliance of labour market dynamics. This in turn eases the setting onto people's behaviours, interactions and minds a particular type of agency that suits neoliberalism.

The words of interviewees reflect how people in poverty have navigated the contradictions of capital through the micro-management of scarce resources and the deployment of agency both in the informal and informal labour market. However, the geographical inequalities from urban to rural areas further exacerbated the loss of control over their living conditions, as the following chapters investigate.

*Prospera*, while aiming to promote self-sufficiency of households and a “work ethic” among its beneficiaries, has also hampered their satisfaction of needs. Furthermore, *Prospera* aims to develop the human capital of its beneficiaries to help them access the labour market and thus escape poverty. However, the recollections of research participants emphasise the lack of realisation of their agency vis-à-vis the labour market (i.e. human capital deficit) that *Prospera* neither addresses nor attempts to address. In fact, by pushing beneficiaries into the low wage survival type of work, the welfare system alienates them from their resources and opportunities.

The market dynamics and the socialisation of roles by sex enabled and promoted by *Prospera* generates asymmetries of power, as analysed in chapter seven. For people in poverty this is particularly acute, given that the perpetuation of such roles in both the private (household/friends) and the public sphere (labour market) further diminishes beneficiaries' control over their income, time and ultimately the structures that contour their lives, as analysed in the following sections.

## **5.2. Time**

This section directly analyses the use of beneficiaries' time by the social programme *Prospera*. Specifically, it investigates how the demands from *Prospera* in the form of talks, workshops, health clinic visits and other activities and events alienate people from their time and leisure time and ultimately separate welfare recipients further from the control over social structures and dynamics that constrain their lives. The main argument is that one's own power to decide how to use time reflects the power dynamics in society as well as hierarchical positions within households, communities and ultimately society. Thus, this section draws from theories of time and poverty (Boltvinik, 1995; Dieterlen, 2003; Gregory, 2017) and alienation (Marx, 1978; Fuchs, 2018; Harvey, 2018a; 2018b; Yibing, 2011), to bring forward an analysis of time, needs and agency. It starts by putting forward the importance of analysing time (its use and allocation) in relation to dynamics of resource allocation. In so doing, it focuses on the dynamics of social reproduction to emphasise the inequalities experienced in society and mirrored within households. It then traces the particular forms in which *Prospera* disposed of beneficiaries' time, thereby perpetuating capitalist exploitation. Finally, it analyses the relation between the demands from *Prospera* to comply with conditionalities and the satisfaction of needs of its beneficiaries.

### *5.2.1. The geographies of time*

The spatio-temporal arrangements of society (Peck, 2012) played a key role in the structuring of social interactions, distribution of resources and access to goods and services, as analysed in this and the following chapters. As previously noted, there were marked differences between urban and rural areas. These differences were critical in the use of time and particularly its implications for social dynamics. For instance, in both rural areas researched there was an undeniable lack of infrastructure such as poor and limited roads, limited or absent sewerage, lack of drinking water, absence of hospitals, recreational or leisure centres, no public offices of any sort, and only one primary school in each. In contrast, all of those services were present in both urban areas investigated, albeit often of dubious quality.

Despite those differences, interviewees in urban and rural areas expressed how inequality affected them daily: from their limited access to social provision to the unfair payment they received having worked a number of hours, which affected their allocation of time for paid and unpaid activities; from the impossibility of having better infrastructure in the community to the staggering differences in their living conditions and leisure time compared to those of wealthy cities and neighbourhoods. Notwithstanding, as previously mentioned, the social programme *Prospera* requires equal commitments from urban and rural households, despite those marked differences. Elena had to walk to the nearest health clinic for her monthly check-ups during her three pregnancies, despite one of them being a high-risk pregnancy. As she expressed it:

*Gerardo*      *Did you ever have to walk to 'Cinco Palos' [nearest health clinic] because there wasn't enough money for transportation?*

*Elena*          *Yes! When I was pregnant with my children... That time they told me it was a high-risk pregnancy and that I had to be there every 15 days. So I was going up and down [the mountain] all pregnant to get there.... But I had to walk a lot, because the doctor gave me an appointment every 15 days, given that mine was a high-risk pregnancy, and that I shouldn't do anything strenuous, that I shouldn't walk, that I shouldn't do anything really... But then I asked the doctor, 'You are telling me that I shouldn't walk, but you are giving an appointment every 15 days?' so he said, 'Oh yeah you are right' so he gave me appointments once every month. But then, as it turned out, my son was low weight, so again I had to carry him up and down the mountain in my arms every month to get there.*

*Gerardo*      *Was there any transportation available?*



*Elena*            *Well no, I mean I didn't have enough [money]... The doctor used to tell me to try and hitch a ride, but I had the bad luck that when I had my appointments there wasn't any... So I suffered a lot with my child, during my pregnancy and when he was born...*

*beneficiary, rural area*

Elena's experience of having to walk to the nearest health clinic (about forty minutes downhill and one hour thirty minutes uphill) was typical for all research interviewees living in the mountainous terrain of *Zapotal*. The fact that they all had to walk there at one point or another despite the lack of asphalt on the road or bad weather conditions speaks of the geographical inequalities present between urban and rural areas as well as of the structural constraints interviewees faced daily, which directly impacted how they managed their time. For Carmen the increased cost of things meant having to get them from the regional capital city of the state, which entails a whole day spent on that:

*"Before, the groceries were cheaper. Now even sugar has risen a lot. I remember I used to buy it for \$5 or \$6 [around £0.23] then it was at \$10 [around £0.43] and it was cheap, but then all of the sudden they increased its price and also the price of beans and cooking oil. Because, you know, that we can only get cooking oil at an affordable price in Xalapa, because here although you can find it, it is more expensive. There, in Xalapa the bottle is at \$15 [around £0.65] but here the price is \$20 [around £0.87], so you have to go and get it there..."* Carmen, beneficiary, rural area

The words of Carmen are a reminder that for people in poverty purchasing goods takes more time and food is often more expensive and hard to acquire. Similarly, but from an urban area, Emily explained the difficulties she experienced when her son underwent surgery and the sacrifices her household went through because of the inequalities they experienced despite living in a capital city:

*"When my son had peritonitis, well yeah it was very complicated because even though we didn't have to pay for it [the surgery], well we spent [money] getting there, staying there, getting a taxi... so it is always complicated. For instance, we went there, and we wouldn't even eat until we came back home. Because, well you can't afford the luxury of eating there close to the clinic because, I mean it is expensive right? So, it was very difficult..." Emily, non-beneficiary, urban area*

Emily's take on her life trajectory brings to the discussion the tensions in time allocation typical of a life in poverty. Additionally, her words highlight how decisions about the use of time are contoured by the needs of a household and, equally important, the efforts required to satisfy those needs. Accordingly, Betty illustrated the difficulties of satisfying subsistence needs, and the sacrifices that entails:

*"The thing with us is that we are always in debt because of food. It is always, always because of food. So the sacrifice really is that you go to the city centre and you fall in love with everything, and you want to buy everything, but you say no! But it all depends, for instance now I need new shoes, I need shoes because this is the only pair I have [pointing to her feet], so I say 'I need shoes', ok, but if I go and buy new shoes and my son needs his school supplies? So I go and say, what is more worth it? So I can wait and later purchase them [shoes] second hand in the street market. So it depends really. Sacrifices? Yeah, there are many, like a lot, like really a lot! So much that you would like to purchase stuff, and do a lot of things, but no... and you have to restrict yourself about everything... Sometimes you say, 'Today we eat beans, and tomorrow, well, we eat beans as well'..." Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

The recollections of Betty underscore the difficulties of accommodating needs within her household. In particular, her words emphasise both the efforts to navigate poverty and the type of measures to make ends meet, which include borrowing money, acquiring second hand products at a distant street market and even postponing the satisfaction of a number of basic needs for some other equally important needs. These findings resonate with findings from evaluations of *Prospera*. Accordingly, "people in

*extreme poverty had to travel longer distances to access outpatient health services. As expected, both distance and time to commute to outpatient health services are longer among potential population [of Prospera] in rural areas (50 minutes and 13 kilometers average) compared to the urban poor (29 minutes and 7.2 kilometers)” (WB, 2001: 56).*

To top that, inflation in the past decade has greatly impacted those with a lower and insecure income (INEGI, 2015), which has added to the inequalities of Mexico. This resonates with research around the “*poverty premium*” in London (Hall, 2012) and Scotland (CAS, 2015) that shows the cost of basic goods and services is higher for people experiencing poverty. As exemplified by Elena, Carmen, Emily and Betty, interviewees spent many hours a month just to obtain goods (shoes, kitchen utensils and school supplies) and services (electricity repairs), and access public services (health care, getting married, funerals), which significantly reduced their control over their time.

On the one hand, in its relation with individuals, the form in which people in poverty allocate time reflects the accumulated disadvantages throughout a lifetime. In particular, their allocation of time is a manifestation of unequal power dynamics and social hierarchies. The fact that Elena from a rural area walked two hours to go to the nearest health clinic and Emily had to skip meals to afford medical attention for her child speaks of those social hierarchies, while the high cost of groceries for Carmen and the sacrifice of some basic needs by Betty reflect the reduced control over their living conditions in contrast with society.

On the other hand, in its relation with society, the allocation of time of people in poverty is a reflection of a mode of production that stratifies society based on the circulation and accumulation of capital that rests, among other things, on the exploitation of (paid and unpaid) labour and leisure time of societies.

### *5.2.2. Time and gender*

Different authors have reflected on time poverty, which refers to the “...*lack [of time] from the side of households who work in excess or don't have enough resources to*

*cover their requirements of domestic work [including child care]" (Damian, 2010: 81). However, the analysis of the interviews shows how people's negotiation of their personal and household needs through decisions around time relates to their position in society, as exemplified by Diana:*

*"My childhood was one of restraints: given that I was the oldest sister I bore the worst part, the oldest is the one who suffers the most ... I didn't go to school... so I started working at a very early age... At the age of 9 or 10 I was already working in the countryside... Now, poverty, I'm still living it... I mean I'm not rich or anything, I don't have a lot of money, no. I don't have money, I don't have properties, I don't have anything really, but what I have here..." Diana, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Diana show how people's position within society, and in a household in particular, impacts on the type of behaviour that is expected from them, as well as the power they are able to wield and exercise. Similarly, Mar, from a rural area, explained it from the point of view of her free time:

*Gerardo      What do you do when you rest?*

*Mar            Well, as a woman, I only get a short rest, because you know, we have to prepare the meal, and then do the dishes and housekeeping...*

*non-beneficiary, rural area*

Diana and Mar's words suggest that people's decisions around the use of time does not occur in a vacuum but rather such decisions are constrained by social dynamics and access to resources. What is more, they emphasise how constraints of time within a household living in poverty disadvantage those who are socially and historically attributed certain roles (caring and cleaning) and those who have "less say" and less power in the house and society (women, children and the elderly). The

dynamics of patriarchal domination have facilitated the dynamics of capitalist exploitation inasmuch as both within the household and the labour market women's power compared to that of men has remained subordinate. However, while dynamics of patriarchy stand, gender theories fall short in explaining the experiences of poverty. This is because the dynamics of racism and patriarchy are subsumed within the capitalist mode of production (Hardt and Negri, 2000), and while these are key to understanding some of the experiences of people in poverty, they are merely layers within capitalist exploitation of people in poverty. In fact, the data on the use of time shows this from the vantage point of the relationship between social dynamics and time allocation. In particular, that access to power not only relates with one's own role in society but the resources one is able to deploy. Eliza from a rural area made this clear when referring to opportunities in life:

*Gerardo*        *You mentioned that in your life there have been opportunities that you would have wanted to take advantage of; what do you mean?*

*Eliza*            *Well maybe to know how to get more money right? Like cooking and selling the food... but in a way you lock out yourself from the world with two little girls, because you have to do everything at home... and maybe because I don't have the time, because all the time is about this and that, and so many things I have to do...but I would really like to continue studying, because, how can I put it? There are so many opportunities out there and it would be nice to continue studying. I learnt how to read when I was an adult, when my daughter was in second year [primary school] and at that age I didn't know how to read...*

*non-beneficiary, rural area*

For Eliza not having access to education when she was young negatively affected the use of her time as an adult. In particular, her position in society and in her household has deprived her of access to certain resources and ultimately reduced

control in the use of her time. It is in this sense that the structures of patriarchal domination have been subsumed within the capitalist mode of production that in the case of Eliza entailed a low-skilled job in the informal economy, limited education and vanished opportunities as a grown up, which she internalised in the form of powerlessness. Similarly, Naty explained how when she is not working on a remunerated activity she is with her family but also doing all sort of household activities in her “free” time:

*"In my free time I am dedicated to cleaning the house. Because during the week you come back home tired, although sometimes there I wash and tidy up my son's room..."*

*Naty, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Naty exemplify how even her free time is loaded with chores that often relate to caring and housekeeping. Similarly, for Angy (rural area) the allotment of time and activities from weekdays is very similar to that of weekends, which in turn relates to socially assigned gender roles:

*Gerardo Are the weekends any different?*

*Angy No, they are the same, for me it's just the same... From Mondays to Fridays I am at home doing housekeeping. And Saturday and Sunday I am also at home. It is not like I am going to go out somewhere, no... Plus, during the weekends he [her husband] doesn't want to go anywhere, because he is too tired..."*

*beneficiary, rural area*

The type of activities performed by Angy on a daily basis are a reflection of the accumulated disadvantages during her life, especially given that she would have wanted to study and access a paid job. In particular, her words show the loss of control over what she can do with her free time. Additionally, her words underscore how the

difficulties of making ends meet relate to the limited available time for both men and women wherein tiredness “fills” the remaining time to do other types of activity<sup>71</sup>.

The dynamics of capitalism largely explain the reduced control that people have over their own time. For people in poverty this entails not only reduced time for resting and leisure but especially that most of their time goes into survival strategies (formal and informal economy). In fact, the words of Naty and Angy actually reflect a commonality among almost all interviewees who spent most of their time performing paid and unpaid work within and outside their households, which leaves them with little to no leisure time. On top of that, as previously analysed, the lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, pushes beneficiaries further away from the control over their individual and collective agency, as chapter six and seven analyse.

Eliza, Diana, Mar, Emily, Carmen, Naty and Angy’s recollections directly speak to the very real constraints they experienced when deciding how to use their time and ultimately how they negotiated poverty and provided for their household. Additionally, and as further investigated here, their experiences underscore how the mechanism of unequal distribution of resources entails a piling up of not accessed resources as a child that worsens the experience of poverty as an adult that advance the alienation from resources and socially available opportunities.

### 5.2.3. Beneficiaries’ time

The institutional indifference<sup>72</sup> of *Prospera* regarding the actual needs of people arising from its behaviourist emphasis on surveillance has further exacerbated inequalities

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<sup>71</sup> According to the latest National Survey on the Use of Time (ENSANUT) women in Mexico only rest, on average, 3.1 hours a week while their male counterparts rest 3.6 hours also a week (INEGI, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> This term gained political sway in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire in North Kensington, London after an interview of the Grenfell Action Group with campaigner Joe Delaney. There, Delaney coined the meaning of the term to explain the government approach to big sectors of society wherein “*they don’t care about them one way or the other. The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference and that’s how those in power view many in our society. We are an inconvenience and our feelings and needs are not even considered...*” This is also the approach of Ruth Lister towards the UK Government under Theresa May and its lack of feeling towards groups of society such as the Windrush Generation, homeless people or benefit recipients (Lister, 2018).

and the loss of beneficiaries control over how they use their time. This in turn intrinsically relates to how they use their money. Jenny exemplified the difficulties she faced in complying with conditionalities, housekeeping and caring for her children:

*"My son who goes to the kindergarten, I take him to the kindergarten and I am pregnant with my other child. I go back home from the kindergarten to prepare the lunch for my son at primary school, because the other one takes his lunch to the kindergarten... so I go back home to figure out what I have to prepare and tidy up the house and cook for when they come back [home]. So, the meetings were first at 11 [in the morning] I think. So, I would come back and off I go to the talks... But my son finishes at 12 [in the afternoon] from the kindergarten, so during the talk I had to ask a moment from the nurse or the doctor to run to the kindergarten and then run back to the talk, and I had my kid there at the talk waiting, and it was almost one hour of talk...." Jenny, beneficiary, rural area*

Jenny's recollections emphasise some of the strategies deployed by interviewees to accommodate attendance at the talks while taking children to school and providing for them. Furthermore, her words underscore a common experience among interviewees of how conditionalities hindered their control over their time. As previously suggested, both the way in which people use their time and the remaining time for leisure are reflections of the inequalities and power imbalances experienced in poverty. *Prospera* aims to counter-balance gender inequalities by giving bi-monthly stipends to women and empower them through the rotating roles of spokesperson, as explained in chapter two. Nevertheless, beneficiaries in worse off conditions often cannot be spokesperson because of the economic and time burden it represents. Betty, from a capital city explains why she would not be able to take on that role:



Gerardo *Would you like to be a spokesperson?*

Betty *Ohh no!! I mean, I don't even have the money in the first place. Then, I don't have the availability of time... Sometimes they have to go there and spend money on this and that, and I don't have enough money to go there. If, for instance, now that I only have \$11 [around £0.46] in my pocket there was a meeting, because they tell you about spokespeople-meetings whenever they feel like it, if they call me now that I have to go who knows where, to get the information... how would I? With only \$11 [around £0.46] in my pocket, I don't have the money, I just can't...*

*beneficiary, urban area*

Lack of time and limited income were the main reasons Betty gave as barriers to become a spokesperson and as such, Betty is materially unable to perform as one. Betty's words echo findings from internal evaluations of *Prospera* showing the related cost (income and time) spokespeople bore. Accordingly, "*when they make a call to the service desk<sup>73</sup>, spokespeople invest [money] from their own resources to make the call... In that sense, the additional costs which spokespeople incur, are the opportunity cost apropos the time they have to allocate to meet the needs of the Program*" (Mir et al., 2017: 152).

What is more, the lack of acknowledgement and in fact indifference towards their living conditions by *Prospera* promotes an unequal distribution of immaterial resources that exacerbates alienation from their material resources, inasmuch as beneficiaries who are worse off are driven away from the control of their material conditions. Thus, current efforts to make spokesperson roles rotatory are insufficient and hampered by both the dynamics in place in a given community and the unbalanced

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<sup>73</sup> The service desk is a mechanism through which *Prospera* provides support to its beneficiary households. *Prospera* sets up service desks with the support of programme representatives and spokespeople in every locality where there are beneficiaries.

functioning of *Prospera* that separates beneficiaries who are struggling the most from society, as chapter seven investigates.

Furthermore, the social dynamics around time and the burden this has on both paid and unpaid work exacerbate alienation of resources<sup>74</sup>. This resonates with research around social roles and how women have historically been assigned the major burden of social reproduction, specifically caring and housekeeping responsibilities (Voguel, 1983). This is fundamental, not only because allocation of time within households is at the core of social reproduction, but also because certain roles are often understood as intrinsic to women, which further diminishes the control they have over their time and leisure time. Within capitalism, as previously suggested, the dynamics of patriarchy - while preceding capitalism itself - become subsumed and are in fact core to capitalist exploitation. In the case of people in poverty, these dynamics have had a direct impact on people's use of their time and types of jobs available, as evidenced by research interviewees.

*Prospera* reproduces social roles by requiring from programme holders, who are mostly women, that they perform all sorts of tasks that constantly clash with their daily activities and as such further reduce the control beneficiaries have on their time. As Monica explained when referring to the burden of all the conditions and activities attached to *Prospera*:

*"I feel that it is a bit excessive... Almost at every step they want [beneficiaries to attend] workshops with a doctor, a workshop here and a workshop there, and picking up the receipts [of their benefits] from a neighbourhood that is in a super far off location... and well, no, I mean we do feel it is a bit of an exaggeration, all they request, but what can we do?..."* Monica, beneficiary, urban area

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<sup>74</sup> In Mexico, the latest National Survey on the Use of Time (ENUT by its initials in Spanish) shows that of the total amount of hours devoted to work, paid and unpaid, men contributed a little more than 40% whereas women contributed almost 60%, while if only unpaid work is taken into account women of 12 years old and over worked triple the registered hours worked by men (INEGI, 2014).

Monica's perspective on conditionalities mirrors the concern of most interviewees regarding the burden in terms of the time they have had to spend complying with the programme for years in order to receive bimonthly economic support. This is precisely the logic behind conditionalities aimed at training beneficiaries to acquire certain behaviours of resilience and self-reliance in an attempt to push people to break out of poverty.

Nevertheless, the reduced control over their time that complying with *Prospera* represents, further clashes with the satisfaction of their needs and, as will be analysed in chapter six and already mentioned by Monica, imposes a sense of reduced self-worth. In turn, this promotes a particular type of agency in line with neoliberalism, and facilitates welfare recipients' submission to the dynamics of capital. As expressed by Cristina, the *Prospera* programme disposes of beneficiaries' time whenever it wants, regardless of their needs and duties:

*"Because there in the programme they can for instance tell us that there is a meeting today at ten in the morning or that at three in the afternoon there is a workshop. And so we are many mothers that are working and cannot get permission or whose bosses won't give them permission..." Cristina, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Cristina emphasise the use and abuse of time by *Prospera* which is a reflection of how it perceives beneficiary women, that is to say, housewives whose time is available to fit co-responsibilities in their agendas. In fact, evaluations of *Prospera* highlight the time burden and cost that conditionalities have on its beneficiaries. Accordingly, *"one of the main results shows that complying with co-responsibilities on the side of beneficiaries makes parents miss important work hours with which they could earn money... This problem is more frequent with women that have to take their children to health checks or talks..."* (Cruz et al., 2006: 69).

This is a reflection of capitalism insofar as people's time becomes functional in the equation of control exercised by *Prospera* that, coupled with the use of shame,

ensures beneficiaries' compliance and a very specific type of behaviour suitable for capitalist exploitation, for instance in the labour market. Furthermore, Jenny's words place emphasis on a section of the population that *Prospera* ironically disregards: single mothers who work.

The use of time for the satisfaction of needs that characterises a life in poverty is not only pressing, but is also constrained by an unequal distribution of power that reduces people's agency. To be sure, the material reduction of agency ranges from the curtailing of an active engagement in activities of their own choosing to the denial of dignified treatment, for which time is an important asset, particularly when it comes to making ends meet. Yet, the programme had little regard for beneficiaries' time, as exemplified by Betty:

*"...They don't care if you work, if you anything! They just say, 'You know when the paycheck delivery is: that day at that time', and you have to go. Either if it is in the morning, or noon, it doesn't matter..." Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Betty underscore the institutional indifference of *Prospera* towards beneficiaries' time. In fact, the underlying assumption behind it is that for *Prospera* time spent on the programme is time well spent, while it perceives beneficiaries' remaining time as at its disposal. Betty's words echo findings from evaluations of *Prospera* showing that *"families incur additional costs in relation to the time they take for withdrawing their benefits and monetary costs for commuting to the place where they withdraw their benefits... This additional cost in the use and withdrawing of benefits was present in the qualitative study of Durango, Chiapas, Puebla and Estado de Mexico..."*<sup>75</sup> (Mir et al., 2017: 153).

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<sup>75</sup> This evaluation was a qualitative study undertaken in four states of Mexico: Durango, Chiapas, Puebla and Estado the Mexico. That is to say, the cost in terms of time and money invested to comply with conditionalities was present in all four areas researched, which echoes with the research findings of this thesis.

This in turn sends a strong message about power dynamics and reinforces local inequalities and power imbalances between beneficiaries and service providers, and ultimately fulfils the purpose of facilitating compliance. Margarita, from a capital city, put it bluntly:

*“That is not good really, because honestly there are times that one comes all tired, and as many of the other moms say, you work and you must get permission [from work] to pick up your benefits cheque and they come out [from the programme] telling us that it is not that day, that we have to come back some other day. And you have to keep quiet; ... so as people say, the money they give us is not really free, free, because you have to waste time and, well, money as well right? Because every time you go there you have to pay for transportation and get food too, because it often takes you several hours there...” Margarita, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Margarita highlight a reality for all research interviewees in both urban and rural areas of having to be available at whatever time and day required by *Prospera*. This is the case for events that are attached to their programme as well as events without any benefit to them, as is the case when *Prospera* summons beneficiaries for political purposes (Hevia, 2016) such as meetings with programme officials. What is more, the recollections of Margarita underscore the mechanism through which *Prospera* has become pivotal in the alienation of resources and time inasmuch as in its attempt to create self-reliance and resilience by pushing (directly or indirectly) a constant state of insecurity on its beneficiaries it has reduced beneficiaries’ power to navigate poverty.

#### *5.2.4. Relevance to alienation*

The separation of the control over the material conditions that contours people’s lives in poverty is also a loss of control over how they use their time. It is in that way that time as a resource otherwise at people’s disposal is alienated from its transformative potential for people in poverty. The dynamics of patriarchy now subsumed within

capitalism particularly affect women in how they use their time, and who also lose control of their free time, trapped in the "*low wage work-household work*" cycle.

Furthermore, the dynamics around health and education that *Prospera* creates in both urban and rural areas that are at odds with people's satisfaction of basic needs intensify that cycle, as the following section investigates. Attempts to counter the loss of control over their time by beneficiary women via shared caring responsibilities with friends and neighbours and support on housekeeping chores among community members are diminished by both structural inequalities and the welfare system.

The rampant inequalities particularly visible in rural areas but clearly present also in urban areas are coupled with a welfare system that, incapable of guaranteeing the satisfaction of basic needs, rests on surveillance of behaviours, punishment of deviant households and reward of those that are already better off. In this way, *Prospera* has become pivotal in the reproduction and increase of inequalities among people in poverty and in particular between urban and rural areas.

For the past twenty years *Prospera* has been core to the alienation of time and resources and ultimately in the reduced control that its beneficiaries have over the material and social dynamics that contour their lives, which they experienced in the form of reduced perception of self-worth, increased insecurity and powerlessness.

### **5.3. Disposal of income**

This section analyses the ways in which *Prospera* disposes of beneficiaries' income. In particular, it focuses on how the differing functioning of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas, facilitates the abuse of power from health care centres and schools via conditionalities that beneficiaries experienced in the form of powerlessness and assault on their dignity. The argument is that while the bimonthly stipend from *Prospera* provides economic relief it has at the same time provided a control tool to government officials, who use the structure of *Prospera* to obtain resources the government has

stopped providing. Furthermore, *Prospera* has become pivotal in the reproduction of self-reliance functional to capitalism and alienation of resources of welfare recipients. This hampers the satisfaction of needs and as such reduces people's control over their living conditions, which further alienates beneficiaries from their power to counter the stigma and shame of poverty and ultimately the exploitation of capital. This section starts by analysing the "voluntary" payments beneficiaries pay to health clinics and schools to keep them running. Then it investigates how, in an attempt to avoid shame and stigma, people support schools and health clinics with the "voluntary" payments and the "voluntary" community actions, which reduces their control over their limited budget. The last part explains the relevance of this to alienation.

### 5.3.1. "Voluntary" payments

Health clinics and public schools started charging "voluntary" donations to users of their services because of regulatory reforms in the past two decades<sup>76</sup>. These "voluntary" donations, heirs of the political "clientelism" in Mexico (Hevia, 2010), marked the establishment of a market rationale into public institutions in the form of self-management. In other words, the government stopped providing public resources for the maintenance of infrastructure or paying bills of schools and health clinics. As a result, health clinics and public schools started receiving funding through self-management. Thus, these institutions must obtain their own funding from all sort of activities including charging a "voluntary" fee to parents, bidding for public funds or organising private events.

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<sup>76</sup> The process of decentralisation mainly during the 1990s went hand in hand with a logic of self-reliance to government institutions in the form of self-management. In recent years, the government has drastically reduced budget allocation to health and education. "In Mexico the average annual expenditure per student from primary to higher education is 19% of GDP per capita; the second lowest average in the OECD" (OECD, 2014). Yet, just during 2017 the Federal Government cut \$35,331,000,000 pesos (around £1,570,266,666) from the Ministry of Education (Patiño, 2016). Similarly, "In Mexico, public spending on health equals 6.2% of GDP, considerably lower than the OECD average of 9.3%" (Universal, 2015) and "in 2017 the Ministry of Health received a blow of 7.8% less than the previous year" (i.e. a reduction of \$10,399,349,046 - around £462,193,291) (Animal Politico, 2016). In turn this has had harmful consequences in terms of people's expenditures. For instance, "the out-of-pocket health expenditure of individuals is one of the highest in the OECD" (OECD, 2016: 3).

According to interviewees, health care professionals and professors requested "voluntary" donations from people and often conditioned the support from *Prospera* on those donations. Carmen explained how representatives of the programme request regular payments from beneficiaries for maintenance of the health clinic:

*"...and when they require the donation, the promoter [liaison person between the programme and health clinics] brings the notification, that we have to pay that amount and that we need to cooperate because otherwise, well, we have to do it because of the vaccinations and because of the programme. Then, they start saying, remember that we are beneficiaries of Prospera. That is, it is as if they had threatened us that we need to cooperate, otherwise... and really in order not to lose it if you don't have it you go and get it. It is like now, they've just asked us for \$30 pesos [around £1.33] about a month ago, and they've just asked us for more now, because they have to buy I don't know what, a printer I think ..."* Carmen, beneficiary, rural area

The words of Carmen reflect the powerlessness she experienced regarding a system that reduces her control over her budget. Carmen's story exemplifies the use of *Prospera* as a platform to access extra income by health clinics, wherein benefits become a control tool that ultimately increases power asymmetries between service providers and people in poverty, as chapter seven further investigates. Additionally, her words when she says: "*if you don't have it you go and get it...*" referring to the payment to health clinics, illustrates how beneficiaries - particularly those with fewer resources - face the contradiction of paying to maintain their programme despite their unsatisfied needs all of which further reduces beneficiaries' control over their income. Similarly, Jacky referred to the reliance of health clinics on donations particularly from beneficiaries of *Prospera*:

*"People say that if it wasn't for the money they request from us, the beneficiaries, the health clinic would have already closed. Because we are the ones who pay for*



*it... There is a treasurer who receives the money... otherwise the clinic wouldn't receive anything." Jacky, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Jacky emphasise the logic of self-reliance enacted from the government onto public institutions and from there onto welfare recipients. On the one hand, the market logic assumes that the more disadvantaged people are, the more they have to be willing and capable of striving, as discussed in chapter three. On the other, the limited resources of schools and clinics pushes doctors and teachers to look for alternative sources of income. The functioning of *Prospera* brings these two together, by giving them the argument (self-reliance of beneficiaries) and the tool (conditioned money) to request regular payments from beneficiaries.

According to practitioners interviewed, *Prospera* has not publicly supported this type of functioning, but it has not done anything to prevent it either. In fact, it has become so extensive that it is now a commonality in both urban and rural areas. In fact, findings from evaluations of *Prospera* show the impact of these payments to clinics on people's use of health services. Accordingly, *"in some cases, the fees and money support to care provided to patients were a factor for dissatisfaction and a reason for not using public health clinics"* (Cruz et al., 2006: 81).

These *"voluntary"* payments are also present in the public education system. There have been several instances where schools denied access to school to children for not paying the *"voluntary"* fee, although the government of Mexico has officially declared that illegal<sup>77</sup>. Nevertheless, forced to get their own funding, schools request *"voluntary"* fees at will. Despite legal prohibition, there are still reports of it happening every academic year across the country (El Universal, 2016; Excelsior, 2017; Echeverría, 2016). In fact, evaluations of *Prospera* highlight the increase of *"voluntary"*

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<sup>77</sup> Largely because of public complaints and media coverage of the problem, the Senate of Mexico on April 9th, 2013 issued a reform to the General Law of Education stating that: *"Under no circumstances may the registration and permanence of their daughters, children or pupils be conditional on the delivery of money, gifts or any other consideration in cash, goods or services... the donations from the parent associations... it is proposed to make explicit the voluntary nature of the same"* (Senate, 2013: 8).

payments in schools. Accordingly, *“it was discovered that the fees for school contributions have increased, although there exists dissatisfaction on the part of parents regarding the quality of teaching and the treatment their children receive in schools.”* (Cruz et al., 2006: 42). Several interviewees referred to it. For instance, Nieves explained how it works:

*“They tell you it is voluntary, but I don’t think it is voluntary when they tell you that you have to pay to the Bank a certain amount on such a date. For instance, for junior high school it’s \$600 [around £27 pounds] and high school it’s \$1,000 [around £45 pounds] and they tell you that you need to pay and that you need to bring them the receipt and copies. So, I don’t see it as really voluntary because you have to pay or your son won’t go to school...”* Nieves, beneficiary, rural area

The words of Nieves clearly illustrate why she perceives the tuition fees as mandatory. The school’s request for a receipt sends a clear message to parents: payment is a requisite for your children to access education. In some cases, the lack of payment had direct repercussions, as Mary from an urban area explained:

*“I mean, supposedly the government had set this rule, that for example if you don’t have [money] to pay the tuition fees, the kid can continue studying; but teachers are not like that. There, you are obliged to pay, and if you don’t, they won’t let the child continue studying.... Ours [where her children studies] is a public [primary] school... This director requires the money, he requests the tuition fees as mandatory and if not the kid cannot get in... For instance, if this fortnight I do not take the money with me, my child will be taken out of school, because that is the way they are...”* Mary, beneficiary, urban area

Mary tells a common story regarding public education in Mexico: despite being free, public schools request payments from parents to keep their children in school. As also evidenced by evaluations of *Prospera*, lack of income can affect school continuity *“through fees [registration], voluntary donations [to improve the school’s infrastructure,*

*to hold festivals] as well as expenses associated with access to schools [transportation, uniforms, supplies] and equipment [additional material for specific tasks, payment of cyber-cafes, photocopies]...” (Mir et al., 2016: 26). The words of Mary and Nieves about payments to the school resonate with the words of Carmen and Jacky about payments to the health clinic inasmuch as they all depict the rise of self-reliance in public institutions. *Prospera* has facilitated this, as analysed in what follows. The self-reliance of both institutions and welfare recipients have become paramount to the reproduction of a particular logic of resilience that is functional to capitalist exploitation, as discussed in chapter three.*

### 5.3.2. Avoiding shame of “voluntary” donations and community actions

The differing functioning of *Prospera* evidenced by the presence of “voluntary” community actions only in rural areas, as chapter two explained, increased the urban-rural divide. Together, the “voluntary” donations through *Prospera* in both urban and rural areas and the “voluntary” community actions (“*faenas*”) in rural areas further diminished beneficiaries’ control over the use of resources. *Prospera* deployed both via public institutions to shame beneficiaries and get them to comply.

Accordingly, schools publicly named “*debtors*” by putting on a wall a list of children’s names whose parents had not paid and read the names aloud during school meetings with parents. Elba explained how the health clinic, which largely relies on donations from beneficiaries of *Prospera* to keep running, sanctioned non-donors with opprobrium:

*“Here in the health clinic, if there is need of water soap, paper... one has to pay, and also give them money for someone to clean it up...We are practically sustaining it... but if you don’t give money, they put you on the list, and we have a meeting where they call your name so that you give [money]...” Elba, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Elba illustrate a common strategy among health clinics and schools: requesting donations from users to get resources. This underscores the

particular forms in which practitioners abuse their power via “*Prospera*” by conditioning benefits upon donations. Similarly, Nieves explained what that meant to her:

*“During the meetings, they announce your name, and every neighbour would know you owe money [to the school]. And it is not as if you didn’t want to pay, maybe it is because you had to buy school supplies and uniforms... so they show you up in front of everyone! And it is shaming, and they say, ‘Oh yeah, it’s you, what a pity!’ But what are we going to do? That’s the way it is...”* Nieves, beneficiary, rural area

Nieves highlights how by shaming parents, the school secures funding the government will not provide, which increases income insecurity and powerlessness among *Prospera* beneficiaries, who fear losing their benefits. Thus, in an attempt to reduce the shame exercised by government officials, beneficiaries’ ability to decide how to allocate their resources decreased.

This “*voluntary*” donations are a reflection of the political “*clientelism*”, that is the use of social programmes for political and electoral purposes (Hevia, 2010). The literature has shown the use of social programmes to manipulate electoral preferences to favour a specific political party (Cornelius, 2002; Diaz Cayeros, 2017; Fox, 1994, Fundar et al., 2006), and CCTs programmes are no exemption to this (Hall, 2012). However, interviewees’ experiences substantiate that this “*clientelism*” once used for and by political parties, has permeated in social dynamics and created new asymmetries of power via new institutional intermediaries (Hevia, 2010) as well as the distribution of formal and informal power among beneficiaries with deleterious effect on social cohesion and the self of beneficiaries.

Schools and health clinics might be legally forbidden to deny service to those who have not paid. Yet they coerce parents into paying through shaming, where the threat of sanction is enough to get parents to pay, as chapter seven further investigates. This is particularly acute for beneficiaries of *Prospera* who fear losing their benefits if

they do not pay. This is the case given that those institutions often rely on representatives of *Prospera* to collect "voluntary" donations, as previously mentioned, thus, adding yet another layer to the inequalities experienced by people in worse off conditions. As such, under-resourced schools and health clinics used conditional money to request "voluntary" donations from beneficiaries of *Prospera*. This situation, coupled with the logic of self-reliance pushed by *Prospera*, further alienates beneficiaries from their resources.

As previously suggested, while health clinics are independent from *Prospera*, some rather perverse dynamics have risen out of that interaction. Beneficiaries were requested to pay a monthly allowance for the doctor, and a yearly amount to maintain the health clinic in good conditions. Jacky from *Milpas* explained the situation:

*Gerardo* So how much do you pay to the health clinic per year?

*Jacky* In this area we are around 150 [beneficiaries]... in total around \$200 [around £8] or more a year [per person]. But if you don't give money, they put you on the list, and when there is a meeting they name them all, so that people give the money.

*Gerardo* So there is a list of 'debtors'?

*Jacky* Yeah, there is a notebook and there they write down [the names of] those who haven't paid.

*Gerardo* And then, what do they do with that list?

*Jacky* Well, they have it there. And every time they go [during the meeting] and keep on naming them and naming them... the spokesperson [of *Prospera*] is the one who names them....

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Jacky resonate with the words of Elba and Nieves above regarding why donations were not perceived as voluntary. For Louise, it is about complying with the “voluntary” community actions that she perceives as a burden or providing a “voluntary” donation to purchase the products needed for the “faena” or paying someone to do the “faena” on her behalf:

*Louise I have never liked them really [‘faenas’]. When it’s time, I’d rather contribute [with money]. I mean they tell us, either you do the ‘faena’ or you give certain amount... It depends, I think now in the health clinic it’s \$100 (£3.9) or \$150 (£5.8) that we have to give.*

*Gerardo How often?*

*Louise Well it depends on the needs of the health clinic; if the clinic requires painting they call us all [beneficiaries of Prospera] to the ‘faenas’ And they tell us ‘people who don’t want to take part in the ‘faena’ can give a contribution’... or they also give us the option of paying someone to do what we have to do [in the ‘faenas’]*

*Gerardo So describe what happens if you don’t go to the ‘faena’?*

*Louise Well, what happens is that you get a deduction from your benefits*

*Gerardo Because of not going to the ‘faenas’?*

*Louise Yes*

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Louise emphasise both the time burden and the economic burden of complying with “faenas”. Furthermore, they signal the “voluntary” payments requested by health clinics only from beneficiaries of *Prospera* to keep the clinics running. In particular, when she said “it depends on the needs of the health clinic” her words highlight the actual prevalence of health clinic needs over those of beneficiaries.

The fear of not receiving a service provision (health and education) together with the coercion of losing their benefits squeezed the income of interviewees and as such pushed them further away from the control they had over their living conditions. This constant calling-out assaults beneficiaries' dignity and reduces their power to counter the shame attached to non-compliance, as chapter seven further investigates. The commitment of parents towards the health and education of their relatives and the community in general, was also a strong reason for them to provide those donations, so much so that they overlooked the cost attached to them.

Not only did beneficiaries face the challenge of paying "voluntary" fees to schools and supporting health clinics with their very limited budget, but the dynamics of unequal distribution of resources from urban to rural areas confronted them with further alienation from opportunities. For instance, in rural areas health clinics closed during weekends and accessing medication entailed paying for private services. For Carmen, having to cope with health-related expenses meant having to pay private health care. As she put it:

*"Well, if he [her son] gets ill during the week, I take him to 'Cinco Palos' [the health clinic in Zapotal]... but let's say he gets ill Saturday or Sunday, then I have to take him to a private doctor..." Carmen, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Carmen underscore how the "voluntary" donations to public institutions, together with the limited infrastructure of local health clinics affected how she managed her limited budget. The fact that Carmen lives in a rural area entailed having to commute to an urban area if one of her family members fell ill during the weekend. On top of that, she had to pay a private general practitioner purely because her community does not have a health clinic open during the weekends. Similarly, but from an urban area, Betty had to face the problems of under-resourced health clinics:

*"When we come out of the public health clinic they tell you, 'You need to buy this medication,' and Jeez! So expensive! And at that moment you never have enough*

*saved money for emergencies. So you go and you have to buy it. But you don't have enough money to buy it, so you go to the DIF [a public institution supporting vulnerable population]. But if they don't have it there, you go to CARITAS [a charity], and if none of them have it, then you have to just wait till you save to buy it..." Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

Despite the availability of alternative sources of health support where Betty lives, the strident budget cuts to health care in Mexico coupled with the scarcity of her resources often meant that she had *"to just wait"* to get better. The words of Betty and Carmen, together with those of all other interviewees that struggled to navigate their health needs, mirror findings from evaluations of *Prospera*. Accordingly, external evaluations showed a staggering shortage of medication in public health clinics and *"the consequence of this shortage is that patients have to purchase medication they need in private pharmacies, which forces them to spend money or endure sickness."* (Cruz et al., 2006: 81).

The inequalities within urban areas pushed beneficiaries to undertake strategies that jeopardised their physical and mental health. This, coupled with the *"voluntary"* donations to public health clinics, alienated Betty from the control she had over her income.

Her recollections, together with those of all other interviewees, highlight the unequal distribution of resources and as such the relation between where one lives and the (un)availability of resources. That is to say, alienation of resources experienced in poverty takes place through the mechanism of geographical inequalities that are visible particularly in the urban-rural divide.

On top of having to navigate the shame of poverty (Walker, 2014) and avoid additional stigma and shame by paying *"voluntary"* fees, interviewees had to perform *"voluntary"* actions in the community to maintain their benefits. The *"faenas"* (voluntary actions to swipe the streets, clean and paint public spaces, explained in chapter two)



that are exclusive to rural areas negatively affected beneficiaries' budget. In an interview with *Prospera's* National Director of Evaluation, he mentioned that "*faenas*" were common in many rural areas of Mexico but emphasised that they were voluntary and did not count as part of the co-responsibilities of *Prospera*.

However, except for two, all interviewees in rural areas felt obliged to comply with them and explained how missing a "*faena*" would represent a deduction from their benefits. Elba even referred to one of her neighbours who "*got a deduction from her programme benefits because she missed one [\"faena\"]...*" On top of that, given that beneficiaries often could not accommodate these "*voluntary*" actions in their agenda, they paid someone else to do them on their behalf, as explained by Louise:

*"We were told that we could either go there to clean and mow, or give them money. So, choosing between going there and giving money, we prefer cooperating with money... So the spokesperson gathers the money and takes the money to the health centre so someone can clean it."* Louise, beneficiary, rural area

Louise emphasises a common strategy deployed by beneficiaries to deal with the burden of "*faenas*": pay someone to carry out the voluntary public service in an attempt to keep their benefits and avoid a deduction. Additionally, her words underscore the pressure that "*faenas*" represent in relation to how they allocate their time between doing household chores, complying with their conditionalities and perform some sort of paid economic activities, which further adds to the alienation from time, as analysed in the previous section. In the case of Cecilia, she preferred to do the "*faenas*" because she feared losing her benefits:

*"They [at the programme] say that 'faenas' are not mandatory [part of the conditions attached to Prospera], but what if the person in charge [programme representative] tells people from Prospera that you do not want to support?... Because it has happened before, that people don't go to the 'faena' and then the*

*doctor at the health clinic confronts them for not complying!” Cecilia, beneficiary, rural area*

Cecilia justified her fear of not attending the “*voluntary*” community actions by reference to the previous experience of other beneficiaries. In an attempt to avoid the shame of being called out by the doctor and avoid being stigmatised as a non-compliant, Cecilia fitted them in her schedule, despite often purchasing products to perform “*faenas*”:

*“During the “faenas” sometimes we have to whitewash. And when is time to whitewash, we also have to cooperate.... We have to purchase the oil, the lime, the detergent that they use... then prepare the mixture and then each one grabs a bucket of prepared quicklime and goes to paint...”*

The very specific example put forward by Cecilia underscores the general functioning of “*faenas*”. On the one hand, her words explain that beneficiaries felt obliged to comply because programme representatives used them to stigmatise and shame them if they didn’t comply. On the other, *Prospera* disposed of the already limited income of beneficiaries by requesting from them to obtain the materials to carry out the “*faenas*”. In *Prospera*’s own terms these “*voluntary*” community actions means that beneficiaries are striving to improve their own living conditions, which aligns with the self-reliance rationale CCT advances.

It might be the case that “*faenas*” are taken as mandatory because of miscommunication in communities, particularly given that, according to public officials interviewed, they are not mandatory. Notwithstanding, they have become a powerful control tool in rural areas – which are economically worse off and as such conceived as more in need of “*re-wiring*” – that clashes with beneficiaries’ needs.

*Prospera* constantly insists beneficiaries must use their money for their children and household’s needs. However, it disposes of beneficiaries’ income directly

and indirectly. It does it indirectly when beneficiaries pay someone to do the “*faenas*” on their behalf and directly when *Prospera*’s representatives and spokespeople request “*voluntary*” donations for supplies of health clinics and schools or when beneficiaries have to purchase inputs to do the “*faenas*”, as previously analysed.

### 5.3.3. *Relevance to alienation*

Social programmes should cushion for the harms of inequalities. Notwithstanding, *Prospera* aggravates them by requesting equal completion from beneficiaries in both urban and rural areas. The geographical inequalities are the backbone against which it is possible to analyse the alienation from resources and opportunities that people in poverty are subject to.

*Prospera* has become instrumental in that health care centres and schools deploy *Prospera*’s spokespeople and promoters to collect monetary and in-kind support from beneficiaries. Moreover, the opprobrium and shame it imposes upon its recipients for non-compliance further reduce beneficiaries’ control over how they allocated their limited income.

Accordingly, the fear of losing benefits and the insecurity this generates pushed beneficiaries to dispose of an income they did not have by for instance borrowing money, and as such going into debt in an attempt to comply with that month’s “*voluntary*” payment. Similarly, beneficiaries in rural areas used their very limited budget to pay for someone to cover them at the “*faenas*” to avoid shame and keep their benefits. These “*voluntary*” conditionalities further squeezed the time, the income and ultimately the control people had over their living conditions that interviewees experienced in the form of powerlessness and assault to their dignity.

The differing operation of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas has its roots in its bureaucratic dynamics and the power relations inside the programme and within the communities, as further analysed in chapter seven. The embeddedness of *Prospera* in the operation of public institutions such as schools and health clinics has made it

central in the interaction between the government and welfare recipients. So much so that it is often used for the provision of many other social programmes (Levy, 2008), and as testified by interviewees often for the collection of monetary support to public institutions at the expense of beneficiaries' needs. Thus, *Prospera* mirrors capital exploitation insofar as it increases income insecurity of its beneficiaries and has become pivotal in reproducing the self-reliance and resilience logic both within institutions and particularly among welfare recipients which alienates them from their resources.

## **5.4. Chapter summary**

Work, time and income were three essential yet scarce resources at the disposal of research interviewees. This section summarises the forms in which alienation from resources took place. It starts by reasserting the key arguments and claims posited in this chapter. It then discusses the core evidence and concludes with the implications for alienation.

### *5.4.1. Key arguments and claims*

Overall, this chapter argued that the assumptions and functioning of *Prospera* alienate people from their opportunities and resources. It first developed the argument of how *Prospera* reproduced the dynamics of exploitation of capital and the forms in which the insecurity and uncertainty it advances served to predispose beneficiaries to comply with labour dynamics. Thus, it argued for the inadequacy and harms of understanding human capital as a power capable of balancing inequalities. It then positioned the argument that people's allocation of time reflects the accumulation of disadvantages through a lifetime. Finally, it argued that the resilience and self-reliance of welfare recipients and institutions advance capitalist neoliberalism.

#### 5.4.2. Core evidence

The first section showed the institutional indifference of *Prospera* towards beneficiaries' needs, particularly of those who had a job and those who found it more difficult to navigate poverty. Furthermore, it showed how the competing demands between satisfying household's needs and complying with conditionalities trapped beneficiaries on the "low wage work-household work" cycle. This reduced beneficiaries' control over their living conditions that interviewees experienced in the form of powerlessness, increased stress, uncertainty and insecurity. Ultimately, it demonstrated that the self-reliance *Prospera* promotes hampered the satisfaction of beneficiaries' needs.

The second section showed the link between time and satisfaction of needs. In particular, it demonstrated how poverty meant having to invest more time to make ends meet, which increased for people who lived further away from a store, a health clinic or a school. It also showed the contradictions of *Prospera* vis-à-vis the income of welfare recipients. Accordingly, it demonstrated how *Prospera* reproduced geographical inequalities through the disposing of beneficiaries' time which increased unequal power dynamics, thus reducing their capacity to navigate poverty and satisfy their needs. It also showed that CCT reproduced gender dynamics and as such advanced the exploitation of capital by pushing people in more disadvantaged positions further away from control over their resources.

The third section showed how the growing conditionalities of *Prospera* diminished people's capacity to navigate poverty. More specifically, it demonstrated the forms in which the potential of time as a key resource of people in poverty was reduced due to the contradiction between making ends meet and accommodating the activities, events and meetings from *Prospera*. It focused on how the functioning of *Prospera* enabled abuses of power by schools and health clinics via conditionalities that beneficiaries experienced in the form of assault on their dignity. Furthermore, it demonstrated how beneficiaries in an attempt to avoid shame and stigma spent their

very limited income to comply with the “*voluntary*” payments and community actions (“*faenas*”) of *Prospera*. This further reduced their control over the satisfaction of household needs, which they experienced in the form of insecurity and powerlessness.

Hence, the institutional indifference towards beneficiaries’ time and needs coupled with the income insecurity that *Prospera* advanced, served to enhance powerlessness and anxiety, and ultimately reduced their power to counter a system that rests on the surveillance of behaviour in exchange for money. The material reality contoured their personal experience and as such their power to navigate a life of unsatisfied needs. Their access to an extra income from *Prospera* provided a cushion to moments of shock, as was the case when a family member fell ill and needed medical care. Notwithstanding, the conditional money that *Prospera* offered is at odds with the material living conditions and in fact worsened the lived experience of poverty particularly of people who struggled the most. Ultimately, people in isolated areas experienced greater difficulty in navigating the increasing conditions from *Prospera* that often clashed with their work, diminished their income and reduced their time for making a living, housekeeping and leisure time.

#### *5.4.3. Alienation*

The motion of alienation from socially available resources and opportunities takes place via the geographically unequal distribution of resources and its concomitant internalisation in the form of powerlessness and assault on dignity, insecurity and uncertainty. Accordingly, these dynamics push people further away from the control over social dynamics that structure their everyday lives and as such alienates them from socially available resources.

The dynamics of capital circulation directly interplay with household’s micro-management of resources. As evidenced by research participants, the commonality in both urban and rural areas was labour insecurity, wages below minimum, limited or absent jobs, and inexistent or insufficient infrastructure. A lifetime of these conditions coupled with repetitive occupations and physically and emotionally exhausting

conditions at work, hamper people's chances of flourishing. Therefore, work becomes a task of mere subsistence and loses its potential for self-realisation.

The welfare system reproduces the dynamics of exploitation of capital by advancing insecurity and uncertainty onto people which predisposes them for compliance with market dynamics. Furthermore, by trapping people into survival type of jobs, the welfare system advances people's alienation and diminishes agency. The unequal distribution of power that a life in poverty entails coupled with a "*one-size-fits all*" approach to poverty alleviation constrains the potential of time to exercise agency and further oppresses the agency of people in poverty. This material and symbolic reduction of agency entails a diminished engagement in fulfilling activities.

The self-reliance advanced within capitalist neoliberalism via the welfare system and its conditioning of government support on the payment of fees by people in poverty in both urban and rural areas reduce their control over their budget and as such their satisfaction of needs. This, coupled with a system that has increasingly disposed of their time, diminishes their access to resources. The unequal access to goods, services and infrastructure, together with the differing functioning of welfare support from urban to rural areas, further squeezes the budget, time and resources of people in rural areas. This in turn increases the inequalities and the urban-rural divide. The geographical inequalities together with the embeddedness of a neoliberal reasoning on the expectations and ways of life, push people in poverty further away from their individual and collective agency, as the following two chapters go on to analyse.

## Chapter VI Alienation from oneself

*"But the most difficult part was wanting and not being able to. To want to be someone and not to be able, for me, that was the most difficult thing..."*  
Asuncion, Rural area

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the relation between the agency of people in poverty and control exercised by *Prospera*. The argument of this chapter is that the underlying rationale of CCT alienates people in poverty from themselves. Alienation from oneself thus understood means a separation of individual power exercised socially to lead a life of one's own choosing. Thus, this chapter directly answers the research question: *In what ways does Prospera impact the self of its beneficiaries in terms of self-worth, self-esteem and power over their living conditions?* To that end, it explains the forms in which the logic of "success" (and failure) drawn from people's living conditions drives shame, lack of voice and reduces the self-esteem of people in poverty.

The core analysis of this chapter focuses on the ways in which interviewees internalised the harms of poverty, inequality, and a welfare system that rewards compliance and punishes deviance. It draws from literature on alienation (Fuchs and Monticelli, 2018; Marx, 1976; Marx 1990; Harvey, 2018; Yibing, 2011) to investigate the tensions between material living conditions, the rationale behind conditionalities and the symbolic experiences of poverty. The first section analyses the rationale of "success" advocated by the programme *Prospera*. It starts by investigating the forms in which *Prospera* penalises beneficiaries for non-compliance despite often damaging household's needs. Then it analyses how *Prospera* makes people responsible for their living conditions and benefits. Finally, it investigates how *Prospera* does that via a reproduction of certain values and living standards that impose a "deservingness"



rationale that reduces the agency of its beneficiaries. This section shows that by doing this *Prospera* reproduces the exploitation of capital. The second section investigates the specific forms of alienation from the self. It starts by explaining how and why for interviewees the conditionalities are problematic, insufficient and often at odds with their needs. Then through the voices of interviewees, it shows the meaning of “alienation from oneself”.

### **6.1. The logic of “success”**

This section sets the basis of how interviewees were alienated from their selves. It analyses the tensions between the logic of “success” enacted by *Prospera* and the living conditions of its beneficiaries. The argument is that this logic, while functional for the reproduction of capitalism, harms beneficiaries’ agency and is at odds with the satisfaction of needs of welfare recipients. This section investigates the mutually constitutive role of welfare and conditionalities under neoliberalism in Mexico as paramount to reproduce capitalism and as such capitalist exploitation that has alienated beneficiaries from themselves. It first analyses the consequences of the “reward-punishment” mechanism. In particular, how such approach is at odds with people’s needs and living conditions. It then investigates the forms in which *Prospera* makes people responsible for being punished and how this reduces their critical thinking and self-esteem. The third part analyses the relevance of reproducing traditional values by *Prospera* for its continuation and the burden of this for its beneficiaries. The last part discusses the relevance to alienation.

#### *6.1.1. The harms of the “reward-punishment” approach*

Advocates of the free market have maintained the idea that “the poor” not only require hard work and effort but a set of personality traits to improve their living conditions (FEE, 2017). Accordingly, people’s willingness to live better and cope with the difficulties of poverty are key features worthy of respect. Largely building on such rationale, a tendency in Mexico has been to understand agency in terms of human

capital. In particular, the approach to agency has been the set of skills that level the playing field for “*the poor*” so that they can participate in the labour market and become active consumers, arguably the cornerstone of a society’s development.

Therefore, the argument follows, “*the poor*” lack the necessary self-sufficiency, resilience, attitudes, aspirations and behaviours to be successful and exit poverty. *Prospera* then provides the incentives (bimonthly stipends) and constraints (conditions upon health, education and nutrition) for its beneficiaries to be trained, to “*re-wire*” them to change their behaviours and ultimately assure that they lift themselves out of poverty through their hard work and effort. This largely depends on people’s human capital achieved particularly during their school age. The goal of *Prospera* is to facilitate the former by focusing on the latter. Nevertheless, in reality that has meant telling beneficiaries they are responsible for their living conditions. While that discourse might aim to empower and promote people’s ownership of their own lives, the internalisation of self-reliance and resilience praised as essential to fight poverty might in fact be counteracting those efforts. Accordingly, Vegonia from a major city expressed her thoughts and feelings regarding control by conditionalities:

*“You have to keep quiet; one is not entitled to an opinion because as they say, we are there to get our benefits; so you hold it all in...” Vegonia, beneficiary, urban area*

Vegonia’s words highlight the feeling of not being entitled to voice her critical opinion because of conditional money and especially the powerlessness at not being able to exercise her agency - an agency in the form of expressing her ideas that she could not exercise for fear of losing her benefits. This suggests that conditioning money upon certain aspirations and behaviours sends a strong message about power dynamics and reinforces beneficiaries’ compliance. The words of Vegonia mirror how Cecilia feels about conditionalities:

*“... so you tell them [programme representatives], ‘Look, my husband went fishing. Sometimes the sea is just not good for fishing but today it was. So they went fishing.’*

*You know what I mean? We need that money! And they [programme representatives] say, 'I don't care, it is your programme or the sea, your work or your benefits'... and because out of need for that money, you accept all the conditions they impose upon you, do you understand?..." Cecilia, beneficiary, rural area*

For Cecilia, unsatisfied needs are the backdrop that impeded her from officially complaining about the unfairness of *Prospera*, inasmuch as compliance without defiance grants her access to an extra income, albeit meagre, for some basic groceries and expenses. However, the resulting powerlessness caused by the inability to air their opinions regarding the conditions attached to *Prospera* reduced Vegonia and Cecilia's power to complain and raise their voice about the unfairness of the programme. Similarly, Dany emphasised how her material needs pushed her to comply with conditionalities:

*"...and one out of necessity for that money, well, accepts all the conditions that they request, do you know what I mean? They just don't give you an option..." Dany, beneficiary, urban area*

Dany, as well as all other beneficiaries interviewed, relied on the bimonthly deposits from *Prospera*. The buffer against moments of shock that the stipend provides (Skoufias, 2001) obliges beneficiaries to accept all conditions, despite clashing with the satisfaction of some of their household's needs. The programme effectively uses this to ensure beneficiaries comply. It does so through a discourse of a promise to escape poverty and earn a higher income provided children continue studying and households complying. However, research shows that the opposite is taking place. More and more youngsters access secondary and higher education to then become part of unemployment statistics, work in the informal economy, take on temporary jobs and a life on a minimum wage (Cunningham et al., 2016), a trend that is particularly acute in rural areas where social mobility is practically null (CONEVAL, 2012). All of which resonates with the historical trends of poverty in Mexico that have remained constant at roughly 46% in the past 15 years (CONEVAL, 2014).

As per interviewees' recollections, the functioning of *Prospera* increased powerlessness and frustration. Adela divorced some years ago and now works full time to provide for her three children and herself. As a beneficiary, most of the time she had been able to fulfil her part of the deal, which entailed attending workshops, talks and doctor's appointments and making sure her children attended school with their school supplies and uniforms in good conditions. However, she admitted having missed a couple of workshops and a health check. One day she was notified of her withdrawal from the programme:

*Gerardo* How was it when they told you they had removed you from the programme?

*Adela:* The spokesperson was the one who told me that I had been unsubscribed... that it was because I didn't attend the health care visits and a workshop. I told her, 'Well yeah, but let me tell you something, I didn't attend because I was working. And I can't send anyone on my behalf to the workshops or talks'... So she said, 'That's the way the rules work'... 'You don't understand the needs that one has,' I told her; just because one is a beneficiary that doesn't mean we have to be just sitting there waiting for our benefits to arrive...

*ex-beneficiary, rural area*

Adela's frustration was related not so much to the difficulties of accommodating the programme's requirements into her agenda, as much as it was about the programme's "cold-blooded" dealing of a very common concern among beneficiaries: navigating the tensions of parenting, a full-time job and complying with *Prospera*. Additionally, as exemplified also by Adela, beneficiaries should attend workshops without the possibility of a relative or household member going on their behalf in case of need. In turn, this increases the loss of control of beneficiaries' time (as chapter five analysed). A promoter of *Prospera* briefly explained that lead beneficiaries should comply with conditionalities, not send someone on their behalf:

*Gerardo Let's assume that there is a workshop and the husband is part of that cluster [household], but the woman can't come and he comes instead.*

*John The female beneficiary has to come*

*Gerardo But if she can't, and he comes in her place?*

*John We don't validate that. Unless it is justified [with a medical report]. If not, even if it is her husband, it is an absence, because the female beneficiary has to come...*

*Prospera's representative*

John's words confirm Adela's experience of how difficult it is to justify non-attendance and particularly how conditionalities are locked to compliance by the head of a household, which is usually a woman. In those cases, fathers are only expected to attend to health care household's visits once every 3 or 6 months. This has generated the perception among men - and ultimately society - that the programme is solely the responsibility of women.

On top of that, and given that getting a leave of absence from work is very difficult on the basis of attending *Prospera's* conditionalities, a household can - and often does - get a deduction from their benefits if the father does not attend those health checks. Ines from a rural area referred to a time she was sanctioned because her husband was working:

*"...I went to the health clinic with my two children... but that time my husband couldn't make it because he was working. They go fishing and they can stay offshore up to 8 days. And that time I told him, 'You know what, I have an appointment that day, you have to come.' But he never arrived.... That time when I went to bring my money from the bank to receive my support I had a deduction... they deducted \$500 [around £19.60]... they only gave me \$450 [around £17.65]..." Ines, beneficiary, rural area*

Ines provides a key example of the disregard of *Prospera* towards the needs of its beneficiaries. In particular, her words underscore the real damage of a system that punishes deviant behaviours regardless of their needs. For *Prospera*, the social benefits of abiding by social norms and regulations compensate any personal cost of shame or deductions on benefits resulting from non-compliance. Notwithstanding, for research participants the material and symbolic tolls of an ill-conceived social programme were harshly felt and directly impacted on the satisfaction of their needs, which hindered their selves.

Accordingly, Adela felt the shame of withdrawal from *Prospera* despite her best efforts. She missed a couple of meetings because she found it impossible to navigate work and conditionalities. *Prospera* praised work as fundamental, yet punished her for non-compliance. Together, the rationale of self-reliance and the lack of programme's consideration for household's needs harmed her. Similarly, Ines was sanctioned because of the difficulties of accommodating conditionalities and her household's schedules. This in turn hampered her income, which affected her self-esteem and reduced her power to navigate poverty.

Vegonia, Cecilia, Dany, Adela and Ines reflect the difficulties interviewees faced negotiating scarce resources and dealing with a welfare system that rests on a "reward-punishment" approach to welfare provision. This was more acute when it interacted with a logic of internalising self-reliance into their interactions with their benefits and needs. Rather than isolated cases of disenchantment about *Prospera*, interviewees' recollections are a reflection of a flawed social programme that aims to train people through conditional money, even when it transgresses beneficiaries' selves. People who experienced the government's attempts to control their behaviour, attitudes and aspirations through conditionalities reported an enhanced sense of losing control of their life and increased anxiety related to both complying and providing for their household, and ultimately, these attempts at control hindered the potential of the worse off to navigate poverty.

### 6.1.2. Internalisation of imposed responsibilities

All interviewees who received support from *Prospera* referred to the countless times it reminded them of the importance of taking responsibility for their benefits. Celestina from a rural area explained how the programme articulated the health clinic visits and workshops to "hang" on them the whole responsibility to keep their benefits:

*"There in the talks they tell us, 'It is you who are going to remove yourselves from the programme...'" Celestina, beneficiary, rural area*

Similarly, Betty exemplified the internalisation of a self-discipline that *Prospera* has transferred through conditionalities:

*"Well we know that if we miss the meetings they take us out of the programme. Or rather we take ourselves out of the programme, as they clearly let us know in there..." Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Betty clearly reflect the internalisation of imposed responsibilities by *Prospera*. This self-accountability is instrumental for the functioning of CCT. Irene also exemplified the internalisation of the self-reliance:

*Gerardo*      *So, is it the programme who takes your benefits away?*

*Irene*        *No, it is oneself. Because if you don't comply, well of course they will unsubscribe you*

*Gerardo*      *So, who is accountable?*

*Irene*        *The responsibility falls on us...*

*beneficiary, urban area*

Irene's recollections illustrate how beneficiaries felt accountable for their benefits and as such reproduced the "deservingness" logic that *Prospera* has imposed on

them. However, this entailed that beneficiaries' critical thinking about the rationale of *Prospera* faded away, as exemplified by Carmen:

*Carmen* ...Because there [workshops, talks] they have told us that it is up to us, that it is not true that the programme takes our benefits away, that it is we who take the programme away from ourselves

*Gerardo* And what do you think about that?

*Carmen* Well, I say that it is perhaps true because if they are giving us the benefits and if we are not using it for the purpose intended, then, yeah.

*beneficiary, rural area*

Celestina illustrates how the training from *Prospera* has influenced beneficiaries' thinking. *Prospera* aims to "re-wire" welfare recipients and make them resilient and accountable for their own living conditions. In so doing, it has also made them accountable if they are sanctioned or withdrawn from the programme.

Betty, Irene and Carmen underscored the centrality of taking ownership of their programme and benefits. What is more, their words highlight the process of internalisation of resilience and self-reliance through exposure to training and repetition of such logic at workshops, talks and health care checks. The example put forward by Marilu as a programme representative shows the link between training from *Prospera*, self-reliance and accountability:

*Gerardo* What kind of values do you think *Prospera* promotes?



*Marilu I think the most important one is responsibility. Responsibility that they [beneficiaries] must have, because they know it! For instance, if you go and ask a beneficiary, 'Do you know what you have to do?' they know! And when they don't do it, there is just no excuse for not doing it!*

*programme representative, promoter*

The words of Marilu underscore the importance of self-reliance in the functioning of training (workshops, talks, health care visits). The residue of this is a "deservingness" rationale instrumental for the operation of *Prospera* wherein beneficiaries constantly need to strive to be worthy of government support. As such, interviewees were merely reproducing what the programme had constantly reinforced on them. Through the symbolic channels of communication and cognition (Bourdieu, 2001), they have internalised the discourse of "deserving poor" and appropriated the responsibility of losing the programme.

Furthermore, according to interviewees, losing the programme was a sign of their wrongdoing that pushed them to self-blame. As such, they often felt that complying with conditionalities was a reflection of their parenthood skills that also increased their stress levels. Nancy referred to the burden of non-compliance:

*Gerardo As beneficiary of the programme, when you have to attend the health clinic visits or the talks but you can't, how do you feel?*

*Nancy Jeez! I feel terrible! I mean, I even get so nervous 'cause, well, I really do need to go...*

*beneficiary, rural area*

Here, Nancy is restating the importance for her to comply with conditionalities, because otherwise on top of losing the cash transfer, the emotional toll it would take on her would be high. Accordingly, "people in poverty are frequently, if not invariably,

*subjected to shame as a social sanction for transgressing the norm of self-sufficiency”* (Walker, 2014: 48). The shame of non-compliance and the stress of fulfilling all the conditions attached to their benefits, harms beneficiaries’ perception of self-worth.

Being confronted with the tensions of proving their worth as beneficiaries and satisfying their household’s needs, reduced beneficiaries’ control over their living conditions. Despite their efforts, in all cases the navigation of conditionalities and satisfaction of needs entailed that their benefits were cut at some point and their needs constantly unsatisfied. *Prospera* alienates people from themselves, which increases stigma, shame and harms the self-esteem of its beneficiaries.

*Prospera*, by transferring conditional money, is in fact transferring something else. It transfers a market rationale in the form of fully accountable and self-reliant individuals in an attempt to channel their behaviours and ultimately control how they use their budget, time and efforts. Once beneficiaries have adopted the programme’s suggestions as life standards and aspirations, those become internalised through means of the workshops and talks and further interiorised through the socialisation with other beneficiaries and professionals of health care and education, as analysed in chapter seven.

### *6.1.3. Reproduction of traditional values*

*Prospera* also advanced the logic of success (and failure) via the reproduction of certain values. During the workshops and talks, it advanced the importance of teaching good behaviour and specific sets of traditional values (around family, parenting) to children. Celestina illustrated some of the key topics taught during the workshops:

*“The workshops are about health, pregnancy, the maximum number of children we are supposed to have, or how to educate our children...” Celestina, beneficiary, rural area*

This brief quote from Celestina is very telling about ideal behaviours and life styles the programme encourages for beneficiaries. Similarly, Irene exemplified what the workshops were about:

*“During the workshops they provide us with information that the programme sends. They [workshops] are about co-responsibilities, making sure we attend [workshops and talks]; how to dress our children, nutrition...” Irene, beneficiary, rural area*

The examples of Irene and Celestina resonate with all interviewees' recollections about the content of workshops and talks. The values and ideas put forward by *Prospera* are a set of seemingly harmless standards and aspirations advanced to improve people's living conditions. Unintentionally, the words of a programme representative in charge of organising workshops and talks emphasise the problems with the imposition of such values and living standards:

*Gerardo     And what are the setbacks that beneficiaries face?*

*Jonathan    I think the programme is very flexible, so I think the programme has no setbacks.*

*Gerardo     Alright, but what do you think are the barriers that beneficiaries face in their day to day?*

*Jonathan* We have communities that are a little distant from here and you know, a person in her forties walking under the burning sun, and maybe doesn't even have [money] to purchase a soda or having to decide, if she has 10 pesos [around £0.35], having to decide what to do with them, taking a bus or buying something to drink right? But listen, despite all of that, they figure out how, but they get here in the end, maybe agitated and heated... but they get here. We have here, in the health care centre a culture that, and we have implemented upon them [beneficiaries] through time, that they have to be here on time, at least 10 to 15 minutes in advance so we can take their attendance..."

*practitioner, promoter of Prospera*

As a promoter of *Prospera*, Jonathan has the task of liaising with spokespeople to reach beneficiaries and make sure they attend and comply with their conditionalities. By failing to recognise the dynamics behind the burden of *Prospera* on beneficiaries, Jonathan is advocating for a particular type of “*welfarised agency*” wherein beneficiaries display their will and effort to receive their benefits. In particular, Jonathan highlights how through the health centres the programme trains its recipients to become praiseworthy individuals. However, this “*welfarised agency*” distorts people's potential to flourish by shaping people's agency to fit programme aims to minimise contention and maximise compliance. Accordingly, a health care professional working with beneficiaries of *Prospera* expressed what in his view the goal of conditionalities is:

*“A series of strategies that result in that change within the population, a change in nutritional behaviours, a change in education behaviours, and a change in behaviours of social connivance... implementing that change of approach... that allows people to change their lifestyles...” health care practitioner, doctor at a health clinic*

The words of Dr. Jose highlight the prevalence of the behaviourist logic beneath *Prospera*. Similarly, Mary, a promoter of *Prospera*, talked about the values promoted by *Prospera*, drawing on that very same logic:

*"The most important value [that Prospera promotes] is the ethic, the responsibility that they must have, because they know. Because if one of them doesn't come and you ask that beneficiary, she knows what she has to do and when she doesn't then there is just no excuse for not complying..." practitioner, promoter of Prospera*

The words of Mary and Jose reflect a very common belief surrounding CCT programmes such as *Prospera*: that they create certain attitudes and values necessary to shape anti-social behaviour. The monthly workshops and talks lay down the internalisation, reproduction and socialisation of "good values" of being on time, resilient and capable of coping with their living conditions. In turn, those values are expectations of behaviours and aspirations that ultimately perpetuate the discourse of "deservingness". Furthermore, they reproduced gender dynamics. In fact, *Prospera* aimed to break with the cycle of poverty by advancing them. Asuncion clearly exemplified it:

*"Previously we were all obliged to be in the workshop, husbands, wives and children, not like today... Always it is only the women, the recipient of the programme..." Asuncion, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Asuncion show the reinforcement of traditional values by *Prospera*. Not only did it push self-reliance and accountability but it also reinforced gendered dynamics into its beneficiaries. Ruth mentioned why she believed women were the main recipients of the programme:

*"I think the transfers [Prospera] go to women because they are more responsible, because they can better manage money; because they use it [money from the programme] better..." Ruth, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Ruth are a reflection of the traditional values upheld in the community and advanced by *Prospera*. The reproduction of traditional values and social dynamics eased the functioning of CCT. Reinforcing the role of women with regard to households and ultimately the community, allows *Prospera* a better control over its main beneficiaries' aspirations, attitudes and behaviours. This coupled with the fear of losing their benefits, the shame of being exposed and the self-reliance about their benefits and living conditions, closes the grip of the welfare system and opens beneficiaries' attitudes to capitalist exploitation.

#### *6.1.4. Relevance to alienation*

*Prospera* pushes the logic of "success" in three steps. First, it penalises non-compliance. Second, it makes people responsible for not complying. Third, it reinforces traditional values that are functional to its continuation, reproduction and to avoid contestation. The logic of "success" (and failure) that grounds on material living conditions is functional to the reproduction of capitalism, as chapter three discussed.

Interviewees were materially alienated from themselves when the burden of exiting poverty was placed on their shoulders but the structural conditions they experienced kept them trapped in poverty, which they internalised in the form of powerlessness, self-blaming, shame, stigma and reduced self-esteem. This actually reduced their power to think critically about the logic of self-reliance or blame the government for reducing their benefits and instead blame themselves for failing to comply. Thus, beneficiaries enacted the "deservingness" logic onto themselves that further harmed their self-esteem.

Through its conditionalities, *Prospera* has served the purpose of facilitating the real subsumption of gender inequalities and patriarchy under capitalism and promoting the beneficiaries' easing into capitalist exploitation. Notwithstanding, as exemplified by research participants, their material constraints together with the symbolic experience of poverty was worsened by *Prospera* and the social construing of their material conditions, which reduced their power to wage struggles against

capitalist exploitation. Furthermore, the idea that people in poverty should work harder, be more adaptive, resilient and self-reliant is at odds with how people in poverty actually deploy agency in the form of hard work and effort as analysed in the next section.

## **6.2. The self of beneficiaries**

This section analyses the implications of *Prospera* for the self of its beneficiaries. In particular, it investigates the unsuitability of *Prospera* to support people's needs and how the "success" logic that it pushes contradicts the lived experiences of beneficiaries. The first section confronts the notion of "re-wiring" beneficiaries behind CCT with people's living conditions and their material and symbolic experiences of poverty. Particular attention goes to the critical appraisal of interviewee's regarding the functioning of *Prospera* and its conditionalities. The second section investigates the reasons behind those negative opinions of beneficiaries by reference to their impossibility of escaping poverty despite hard work, sacrifice and effort, which is at odds with the rationale of *Prospera*. The third section analyses the implications of poverty for the self of interviewees. The focus here is on people's explanations of alienation from the self. The last section discusses the relevance to alienation.

### *6.2.1 Beneficiaries' take on Prospera*

The life trajectories of interviewees show how much hard work, sacrifice and effort they made to make ends meet. Nevertheless, *Prospera* calls for a change of mindset of "the poor" so that they can become hard working people who can adapt and be resilient to the experience of poverty. A health practitioner, when confronted about the limitations of the idea of "re-wiring" people in poverty, put it clearly:

*"But surely we can agree that there is sufficient evidence to support that rewiring people's minds does work on the basis of robust neuroscience hard data... we have found that people's behaviours are subject to improvement... [there is] the case of people with deep depression that after [being subject to] a tailored holistic approach*

*[encompassing psychiatrist, psychologist, neurologist, physiotherapist] they were able to lead a fulfilling life, even after having an accident, losing a loved one or recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder... [thus] we can be certain that this also works for 'the poor' in training them and changing some harmful behaviours..."*  
*health care practitioner*

The words of Dr. Henry in favour of “re-wiring” “the poor” resonate with the logic behind conditionalities. There, the assumption is that rational individuals that interact on the free market are able to lead a life of their own choosing. Accordingly, “the poor” would require a “re-wiring” of behaviours, attitudes and ideas by providing them with the right incentives so that they become hard working, resilient and self-reliant to get a job, increase their income in the labour market, become successful and lift themselves out of poverty. Largely, conditionalities built on this type of individual-based solution to a societal problem. Nevertheless, beneficiaries’ experience of a life in poverty as well as their interaction with *Prospera* illuminate the limitations and in fact harms of such an approach.

According to urban and rural interviewees, the so-called co-responsibilities of *Prospera* did not fit their personal and household needs. Mary who is in her 50s and lives in an urban area, stated that conditionalities are:

*“...Just another tick box... you go to the health visits just to comply. They only ask you for your card, they take your weight, your height and take your attendance, and that’s it.”* Mary, beneficiary, urban area

Mary felt disappointed with the poor quality of the health care service she and her relatives have received through *Prospera* for almost a decade. Her words are a demonstration of a system that has failed to provide adequate health care to a vast number of families. Despite some improvements on pre-natal support and early years health care for its beneficiaries (Lagarde et al., 2009) research shows that the effect of



*Prospera* has not been consistent across all age groups of children (WHO, 2010), and is particularly limited for the most remote areas.

Furthermore, the limitations of training provided by *Prospera* might in fact be revealing something else about conditionalities. According to James (a researcher interviewed during the fieldwork), workshops and talks lack pedagogy and the information they provide is often of low quality. This mirrors the words of most interviewees regarding training from *Prospera*. For Vegonia, the information she has received from the workshops and talks has not been very useful:

*Gerardo* *What do you think about the workshops and talks?*

*Vegonia* *Well, in fact we don't really see many advantages. Because, I mean they are not very interesting, really. I mean, they give us information, right? But no, almost nothing, it is only because it is mandatory that we go...*

*beneficiary, urban area*

The explanation of Vegonia highlights that she attended workshops and talks only because they were mandatory, not because they represented any real benefit to her or her household. Similarly, Margarita explained the limited relevance of workshops and talks particularly because the information has remained practically the same over the years.

*Gerardo* *What have you got from the workshops and talks?*

*Margarita Nothing! Because it is always the same, they keep saying the same. The talks are always about sexuality, about cancer, about AIDS, STDs; I mean that's it! They don't tell us anything new, it's only that! So I really think they are not relevant, because it is always the same... that we have to use protection and not have more children....*

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Margarita underscore the limitations of the information that *Prospera* provides. In particular, they reflect a common perception among interviewees: they did not feel the support from *Prospera* represented their needs. In addition to interviewees' opinions about the reduced diminishing relevance of information they have received, conditionalities have increased over time. Accordingly, Lupe complained about the growing demands from *Prospera*:

*"Lately, there have been many things going on, they are putting us between a rock and a hard place... The more time it passes, the more requisites there are; they are making it difficult for us. They might as well just take us out of the programme at once, instead of looking for excuses to unsubscribe us..." Lupe, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Lupe resonate with research showing the increased conditionalities on rural areas when compared to urban areas (Hevia, 2009). Elena, mentioned something very similar to that:

*"I'm telling you, they are demanding a lot from us, they are demanding more now. Probably they are thinking to do that so we start dropping out of the programme..." Elena, beneficiary, rural area*

For Elena and Lupe, the growing demands are merely a government's attempt to cut as many beneficiaries as possible out of the programme, which is a reflection of

interviewees' view of their interaction with *Prospera*. Hence, interviewees when talking about this, referred to feelings of powerlessness, self-blaming, despair and rage, as discussed in what follows.

For Lupe, the growing demands pushed her to close the bakery to meet conditionalities and thus stopped earning money from selling bread every time she had to attend to the programme's requirements. Ultimately, conditions attached to Mafe's benefits hampered the satisfaction of her household's needs.

*Gerardo* *Is there any difficulty in complying with conditionalities from the programme?*

*Mafe* *Yeah, to attend the talks and to the workshops. Because I start working at noon... And all of those things are during the morning... Sometimes it is 9 am and the talk hasn't even started. And then they finish at one or two and I already have to be here [working]... and honestly it is not even much, what they give us..."*

beneficiary, rural area

The words of Mafe underscore how beneficiaries are required to attend health checks and workshops, despite often clashing with their household and work duties. On top of the limited relevance of workshops and talks to beneficiaries, and the growing conditionalities over the years, interviewees also talked about the reduced impact of *Prospera's* benefits. Ruth put it clearly:

*"For me, I really think that what they [Prospera] give us is very little. For example... I live uphill and I have to climb around 100 steps and the doctor just told me that my knee cartilage is wearing out, and it hurts, it hurts a lot! And it is hard because if I want to have surgery - medication is not covered, you know? I can still work now, but what about later?" Ruth, beneficiary, urban area*

The case of Ruth emphasises the insufficiency of the support from *Prospera*. This is because being a beneficiary did not grant her access to the knee surgery she required and also because her benefits did not cover the related expenses. In fact, almost all interviewees (except for three) felt their benefits did not suit their needs and while they were useful to pay for certain things, they were certainly insufficient. Moreover, interviewees explained both the insufficiency and the cost of complying:

*Gerardo* How important has *Prospera* been for you?

*Naty* It has not helped me a lot, honestly

*Gerardo* Why?

*Naty* Because, well, they don't give you much really. They give very little. It is like \$1,300 [around £50.98] or \$1,200 [around £47] they don't give you more. Especially if you miss the meetings, the talks, the workshops and that, they give you even less. They just don't understand, the people from *Prospera* that we have to make a living, we cannot just be there at the expenses of the programme...  
*beneficiary, rural area*

For *Naty*, complying entailed a burden in terms of navigating poverty and making ends meet, despite the little support she got from *Prospera*. Similarly, for *Monica* the fact that the benefits from *Prospera* did not suffice even to get appropriate health care makes her outraged:

*"None of the government hospitals has medication... This makes me feel rage, rage and powerlessness, because imagine if you have to get a medication that is worth \$400 or \$600, how can you buy that? You don't! You just don't!..."* *Monica, beneficiary, urban area*

The examples put forward by Monica and Naty highlight the meagre support they got from *Prospera*, but especially the real limitations and burdens that complying with it represents. As a result, people felt powerlessness, rage and despair about the impossibility of changing their circumstances, as the following section further investigates.

*Prospera* aims to train beneficiaries through conditional money. However, the life trajectories of research participants show the repetitiveness of the information they received, for which they perceived conditionalities merely as “another tick box” as Mary put it. Furthermore, they demonstrate the support they received did not fit their needs and in fact was at odds with their living conditions.

The rationale of *Prospera* relies on quantity: the amount of times households attend or miss their appointments regardless of the quality of the service. Furthermore, the benefits it provides do not grant beneficiaries enough economic relief, good quality education, proper health or even access to basic medication. This shows that in reality workshops, talks and health care visits aim to “re-wire” them and make them resilient, adaptable and self-accountable for both their benefits and their living conditions.

As the previous chapter analysed, this results in a tension between requirements from *Prospera* and satisfaction of beneficiaries’ needs. Notwithstanding, people felt compelled to comply. The pressing needs of poverty, coupled with a system that trains them in self-reliance and shames them for non-compliance results in people internalising the “deservingness” rationale advanced by *Prospera*, which increased their powerlessness and self-blaming and reduced their self-esteem.

All of this was present in both urban and rural areas. Notwithstanding, it had a particularly acute effect on people living in remote communities, single mothers and people caring for the elderly or a relative with disability, as the following sections further investigates.

### 6.2.2. Beneficiaries' strategies

Interviewees' accounts of their life trajectories showed what they all had to go through to survive. Hard work, sacrifice and effort did not suffice to make a living. This endured throughout the years and intensified from childhood to adulthood. Mary, when asked about her life as a child compared to now as an adult, said:

*"I do remember that, when it was my birthday, well, there wasn't anything special at home.... And from there, when I turned 15 years old it has all been work, pure work. Only working, and working and till now we are still working..."* Mary, beneficiary, urban area

One of the main characteristics of the personal experience of Mary has been a constant deployment of effort in the formal and informal economy. This is a testimony of how much hard work she has needed to subsist. In fact, Mary's situation was the most common among all interviewees: a life of hard work, low wage, and frequent fluctuation between formal and informal work and constant unsatisfied basic needs, as chapter five investigated. Similarly, Diana explained the burden of constant worrying about providing for her household:

*"So it's about getting discounts at the store, trying not to waste it [money]. So for instance from the moment you lay down your head on the pillow or you barely finish your day's chores you start thinking, 'What can I do tomorrow to make the money last? I only have this much,' so you have to set yourself a limit..."* Diana, beneficiary, urban area

Diana's recollections bring forward the constant worrying and stress of meeting subsistence needs. Her words reflect a very common concern among interviewees of how to make money last in order to fulfil their household's basic needs. However, besides sacrifice and hard work in the labour market interviewees in rural areas also constantly referred to another key form of agency for survival: that of

subsistence farming and fishing to alleviate hunger of their households. As expressed by Carmen:

*"We sow on a little plot we own; we sow corn, beans and pumpkins. We use all our crop for self-consumption." Carmen, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Carmen exemplify how important self-consumption is for her household. The utility of the product of her labour rests on directly satisfying a need. For her household, selling crops in the market at the prices they would be able to position them is just not reasonable. Accordingly, *"profitable investment projects in agriculture or other activities associated with land are very scarce among the rural poor"* (Levy, 2008: 75). People in urban areas had some alternative sources of income albeit often entailing meagre wages; people in rural areas relied on self-consumption to subsist. Jacky explained that in her community fishers preferred to consume what they fished rather than taking them to the market:

*"Often you go fishing, and you get what, a kilo? When there is a lot of production, unfortunately... they pay it [1 kg of fish] at \$30 [around £1.17] or \$40 [around £1.56] [Mexican] pesos; and what do you do with that when you have children?... You don't eat that day, you just don't eat! And it is only because as a fisher you think, well I caught 1 kg of shrimps, I'm not going to sell it. I'd rather cook it, and I will make it last as much as I can, so we can all eat in the family... But how can I put it, the life of fishers is low ..." Jacky, beneficiary, rural area*

The case of Jacky and Carmen illustrate the contradictions between hard work, sacrifice and effort in rural areas, and the satisfaction of needs within a system that rests on extracting surplus value at the expenses of the satisfaction of basic needs of a large number of people in society. Thus, their chances of accessing other types of products and resources diminished and as such, the satisfaction of their needs was hindered. To the extent that people were not able to satisfy basic needs and found themselves struggling to navigate welfare conditionalities, people felt trapped in a cycle

of powerlessness, shame and insecurity that worsened their experience of poverty. This was particularly acute for people in worse off economic conditions, as the last section investigates.

Under such conditions, Mary, Carmen and Jacky's impossibility of generating a higher income through labour was directly proportional to their limited possibility to access goods and services and thus satisfy their basic needs. Yet *Prospera* insists on a monthly basis that it is only through their hard work and effort, adaptation and resilience that they will exit poverty. Accordingly, in his address to the nation presenting the "renewed" programme *Prospera* in 2012, the then President of Mexico Enrique Peña Nieto stated that the beneficiaries will (Presidencia: 2012: 3)

*"...have new tools and additional support so that they can use these acquired capacities in productive activities that will give them a higher income... The objective is that those who receive a social benefit, those who are beneficiaries of the Prospera programme, do not just stay there, but actually get incorporated into a job or a productive activity that allows them to reach their autonomy and economic independence...(so that) beneficiaries count on benefits to get a source of income that allows them to exit poverty through their own work an effort..."*

These words recall those of Karl Marx back in 1867, but from a different angle. When talking about productivity Marx mentioned, *"The worker produces not for himself but for capital. It is no longer sufficient, therefore, for him simply to produce. He must produce surplus-value. The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value..."* (Marx, 1990: 644). The words of the then President of Mexico are clearly aligned with the promise of upward mobility through hard work, provided people participate in the labour market and ultimately the consumption process. However, over 20 years have passed since the implementation of *Prospera*, and the number of people living in poverty has stagnated, as chapter two discussed. The rationale of exiting poverty through hard work, sacrifice, effort and resilience advanced by *Prospera*



is at odds with the material reality of interviewees. Angy explained how in more than one occasion her household has faced a day without food:

*“Sometimes when we don’t have enough to eat, I’d rather my girl ate instead of me. That’s how I do it sometimes. Sometimes we don’t even have something to eat.” Angy, beneficiary, rural area*

Angy’s recollections exemplify how despite their effort, they often had to skip a meal, wear torn clothing and choose to either take a bus or buy medication. This sacrifice is a form of agency outside the production process that interviewees often relied on to navigate poverty. The acute demand to satisfy their basic needs largely drives the agency that interviewees displayed, among other things, through hard work, sacrifice and constant effort. Notwithstanding, and despite people’s best efforts to improve their living conditions, they remained in poverty. The “*quid-pro-quo*” approach of CCT that advances a logic of “*success*” based on capitalist terms decreased beneficiaries’ power to navigate poverty. Betty put it clearly:

*“If you miss one of the conditions they put you down as absent and it’s a problem. Like now, you know, with the technology, it’s all about WhatsApp. But I don’t have it! So I have to call by phone. And if there was something [summoned by Prospera] and I call, say, tomorrow they tell me, ‘Didn’t they tell you? It was yesterday!’ But who is it who’s gonna tell me, living this far? I don’t have WhatsApp! It’s like this last time, they summoned us and told us to go to the ‘Macuiltepetl’ hill... And you know [once there] some of the attendees were illiterate and couldn’t read the notice board, and they told me that it was the doorman [who] informed them there wasn’t any meeting taking place. So I latter called and again they told me, ‘Didn’t they tell you? It was cancelled until further notice.’ So the following Friday I called back and they said, ‘The meeting was last Wednesday, didn’t they tell you?’ ...” Betty, beneficiary, urban area*

The back and forth process explained by Betty that she had to go through simply to comply with *Prospera* hindered her time and income which further reduced her control over her living conditions, as chapter five analysed. Her recollections also exemplify that people with fewer resources are often left out and as such struggled the most to keep up with welfare conditionalities. Her words also emphasise that the logic of “*success*” evidenced in the self-reliance and resilience advanced via conditional money increased her powerlessness and insecurity and reduced her self-esteem. This was more acute in her case because of her lack of access to a mobile phone with Whatsapp on which the functioning of *Prospera* increasingly operates<sup>78</sup>. Both the functioning of *Prospera* and the urban-rural divide in terms of access to resources, health, education and infrastructure on which *Prospera* rests to provide support, further increased inequalities.

### 6.2.3. Beneficiaries’ agency

Poverty tears the satisfaction of socially developed needs away from its socio-historical content, and as such, it alienates the potential of individuals to exercise their self socially. Yet *Prospera* aims to break the transmission of poverty from generation into generation by appealing to sacrifice, more resilience and hard work of its beneficiaries. The material reality of poverty, together with the limited opportunities, limited available time and working in a kitchen in the informal market earning the minimum wage, blocked Naty’s agency. As she put it:

*Gerardo*      *Is there anything you would have wanted to do, but you didn’t have the opportunity?*

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<sup>78</sup> In urban areas all communication between beneficiaries and *Prospera* took place via WhatsApp. The case of Betty also emphasises the relevance of the impact of the geographical unequal distribution of resources, discussed in chapter five

*Naty Ufff, well, finishing studying, because that way I wouldn't have had to work in the kitchen, because by studying one has, one aspires to more, to something else, a better job. But what can we do here?... Because, well, I didn't study, I would have wanted to study, you know, to be someone in life but it wasn't possible.*

*Gerardo What do you mean by being someone in life?*

*Naty Well to have a good job; that we had enough resources, to have more opportunities; to move on. I'm not saying that it is not a job to go work in a kitchen, but one wants to aspire to more, but I couldn't, I simply just couldn't. If I had had the opportunity but not..."*

*beneficiary, urban area*

As shown in chapter five, the mechanism of unequal distribution of resources entails a piling up of not accessed resources as a child that worsens the experience of poverty as an adult. Naty's recollections directly speak to the very real constraints she experienced when deciding how to use her time and ultimately how she negotiated poverty and provided for her household. In particular, her words are a reflection of the harms on the self because of structural constraints and social inequalities despite her hard work, sacrifice and effort. Similarly, when explaining her feeling about her life, Ruth succinctly defined alienation from the self:

*"I have two children and I often tell them that for me life went by like that, like turning over a page of a book without even reading it..." Ruth, beneficiary, urban area*

The loss of control conveyed in Ruth's words are a powerful account that reflect the many deprivations experienced in poverty and the lasting effect on herself. Her recollections strike a chord with the feeling of unrealised potential of all research interviewees. In the case of Diana, she internalised poverty in the form of lack of personal satisfactions:

*“Feeling proud, like proud about something? No, I don’t feel proud... I don’t feel proud, no, because in the end I didn’t finish my career right? And it was something important perhaps in life and perhaps something that would have made me feel proud. However, I didn’t finish...” Diana, beneficiary, urban area*

Diana’s feeling of unrealised potential reflects the specific ways in which interviewees internalised the material hardships of poverty. Her words put clearly one of the most difficult things about poverty: not being able to realise personal projects. Interviewees displayed a feeling of satisfaction with regard to raising their children and hopes in relation to the possibilities for the future generations. Notwithstanding, they internalised the unrealised critical agency in forms that harmed their selves. The recollections of Naty, Ruth and Diana put forward the manifestations of alienation from the self that were a commonality across all research participants. Moreover, poverty had a particularly deleterious effect for people in rural poverty. In the case of Ines, poverty has been about powerlessness:

*“How do I feel about my life? Well, I feel powerless, right, powerlessness because, you say, gosh! Where can I turn to, or what? Who can I get support from? Like you have to adapt, whatever the situation... There is no way around...” Ines, beneficiary, rural area*

The powerlessness of Ines comes from years of not being able to change her living conditions yet having to continue navigating poverty. Similarly, Angy explained the most difficult thing about poverty:

*“... I feel that food, despite it all, we had some. At least we had beans and chilli to eat... Because, maybe I didn’t have birthday parties, but for me that wasn’t that difficult. Maybe we didn’t have a good house, but at least we knew there was a roof. But the most difficult part was wanting and not being able to. To want to be someone and not to be able, for me, that was the most difficult thing...” Angy, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Angy are a clear portrayal of the scars of poverty on the self. This is the essence of what alienation from oneself means for people in poverty: that is the material impossibility to lead a life of their own choosing, because of their living conditions and despite their efforts. The lack of resources and opportunities accumulated over time that were more evident in rural poverty meant a yet more reduced possibility to satisfy subsistence needs and in that sense to lead a life of their own choosing. Lorena put it bluntly:

*“Barely six months after becoming a single mother, because my ex and I split and he had forgotten about his daughters, right, and well what I earned was not enough to give a university education to my daughter, because I had to feed her, dress her and the time came when I was getting ill, because there wasn’t enough... but I was feeling so much pressure for not having enough and she was making so much effort at high school that I wasn’t even sleeping or anything; and the time came that I told my daughter, ‘Look I can’t, I swear I just can’t,’ I mean I wanted to give her more, but I just couldn’t. So she just approached to me and told me, ‘Don’t you worry, I prefer to stay where I am than to see you getting sick... what am I going to do without you if you get ill?’ ... and she burst into tears and cried bitterly because she knew that her career was over... and I wanted to give her more but I just couldn’t... It is very sad, poverty is... You lose a lot of things, you lose part of yourself... It is losing part of yourself, it is losing oneself...” Lorena, beneficiary, rural area*

The frustration conveyed by the words of Lorena come from years of living in poverty; a life of unsatisfied needs and holding herself responsible for not being able to provide for her family. More specifically, it comes not only from the accumulation of unsatisfied needs throughout her life, but from the impossibility of giving her daughter access to higher education despite her best efforts. Thus, according to interviewees, poverty entails a life of deprivations, a life of constant struggles doing the best they could yet realising that it was never enough to escape poverty. This was exacerbated by a welfare system that pushed them to prove their worth as “*deserving*” beneficiaries

while reinforcing the self-reliance, resilience and adaptation perniciously perceived as "*the key*" to escape poverty.

While this was particularly acute for people in rural areas and single parents, the alienation of the self manifested in very similar forms, as showed by interviewees. The words of Naty, Ruth, Diana, Ines, Angy and Lorena illustrated the motion of the material hardships and the symbolic rim of poverty, from the vantage point of the self. The alienation from the self that they endured mirrors the experiences of all research interviewees in both urban and rural areas that they personally encountered in the form of a reduced agency, shame, self-blaming, frustration, despair, insecurity, reduction of self-worth and powerlessness.

#### 6.2.4. *Relevance to alienation*

Conditionalities of *Prospera* do not work and in fact harm the needs of people in worse off conditions. This is because in its attempt to change people's behaviours and attitudes through training, it pushes beneficiaries further away from their critical agency. Conditionalities did not fit the needs of beneficiaries, did not guarantee satisfaction of basic needs and often harmed them. Furthermore, the logic of "*success*" contradicted people's lived reality. This was the case because despite their hard work, effort and sacrifice they did not escape poverty. Yet *Prospera* advocated for the self-reliance and resilience of its beneficiaries, which reduced their self-esteem and produced despair, anger and powerlessness.

In an attempt to break with their "*wicked*" priorities and aspirations (i.e. their failures), the *Prospera* programme trains its beneficiaries and expects a behavioural change in exchange for some money. The internalisation of self-reliance through training adds up to the self-responsibility for providing to one's own family, which further clashes with the shame and powerlessness of not being able to exit poverty. This is pernicious given that insisting - on a monthly basis - on beneficiaries' responsibilities is nothing but a reminder of something that is by itself already hard to put up with: unmet needs. The rationale and functioning of conditionalities enhances the shame

particularly of the worse off. The control *Prospera* exercises on its beneficiaries clashes with people's agency and at times with their household needs, which alienates them from themselves, as previously analysed.

Thus, conditionalities in their relation to individuals are reflections of an ill-conceived individualism that responds little or not at all to the needs of people living in poverty. As such, conditionalities have played an important role in aggravating the intergenerational experience of poverty of the worse off. However, in their relation with the circulation of capital, conditionalities mirror the market rationale, inasmuch as they hold individuals responsible for structural problems. Thus, the form in which self-reliance of conditionalities have embedded in people perpetuates the dynamics of inequality and exploitation of a neoliberalised system, that alienates people from their self as previously analysed.

### **6.3. Chapter Summary**

Poverty harmed the self and as such the realisation of critical agency of interviewees. This section summarises the form in which alienation from the self took place. It first reaffirms the core arguments and claims put forward in this chapter. It then explains the core evidence and concludes with the implications for alienation.

#### *6.3.1. Key arguments and claims*

Overall, this chapter argued that the underlying rationale of *Prospera* and its functioning alienate people from their self. It claimed that the idea of "success" advanced by *Prospera* is functional for the exploitation of capital and accordingly, that this idea, which draws from material living conditions, is at odds with the needs of people in poverty. It then put forward the argument that this idea of "success" advances a "deservingness" logic that functions to guarantee compliance while reducing defiance. Finally, it positioned the argument that the attempt to "re-wire" "the poor" by the welfare system through training does not attempt to fulfil beneficiaries' needs and in

fact aims to align people's behaviours to a particular type of "*welfarised agency*" that is functional to capitalist neoliberalism.

### 6.3.2. Core evidence

The cash transfer people received provided them with some economic relief. However, this chapter showed that the "*reward-punishment*" approach to "*re-wire*" "*the poor*" reduced beneficiaries' voice and pushed them to accept conditionalities despite clashing with their needs. In turn, the enactment of punishment by *Prospera* for non-compliance increased powerlessness and frustration among its beneficiaries. Furthermore, the inflexibility in terms of compliance increased the burden on heads of households.

It also demonstrated that *Prospera* assured the reproduction of self-reliance and self-accountability into beneficiaries' behaviours by constantly insisting they were responsible for their benefits and living conditions. As a result, beneficiaries internalised the "*deservingness*" rationale that reduced their critical thinking about the functioning of *Prospera* and felt compelled to self-blame, thus increasing shame.

It then showed that the reproduction of traditional values by the welfare system advanced a "*welfarised agency*" that distorted people's flourishing potential. Accordingly, it reproduced gender dynamics that facilitated the functioning of *Prospera*, which permitted better control over its main beneficiaries. This, coupled with the fear of losing benefits, the shame of being exposed and the self-accountability over their lives and benefits, made beneficiaries susceptible to capitalist exploitation.

It demonstrated that conditionalities represented only a "*tick box*" to access some extra income. This was the case according to research interviewees, because such conditionalities did not represent their needs and have increased over time which has made them feel that the only goal of *Prospera* is compliance as opposed to helping them escape poverty. Furthermore, it showed that the functioning of conditional money is at odds with their needs, which they internalised in the form of despair and anger.



The life trajectories of research interviewees evidence the constant worrying and stress that poverty entails. Furthermore, that the fact that they could not satisfy all of their subsistence needs and navigate welfare conditionality drove them into a cycle of shame, powerlessness and insecurity. Thus, it demonstrated that the “*quid pro quo*” approach of CCT reduced beneficiaries’ power to navigate poverty.

### 6.3.3. Alienation

The motion of alienation from oneself takes place through a materially grounded idea of “*success*” that is functional for capitalist exploitation and that people in poverty internalised in the form of shame, stigma and despair; lack of voice, powerlessness and reduced self-esteem. The result of this was the reduced flourishing potential that pushed them further away from the exercise of critical agency.

In its relation with needs, sacrifice is a manifestation of agency to navigate poverty, but in its relation to the circulation of capital sacrifice is a manifestation of unsatisfied needs of people in poverty. When basic needs are unsatisfied - a situation that was frequent among interviewees - the potential of the self was limited to mere subsistence. According to Meszaros, “*the gratification of human needs takes place in an alienated form if this means... a submission to the crude natural appetites*” (Meszaros, 1970: 174). The idea that “*success*” depends on material living conditions allegedly accessible through hard work in the labour market produced the powerlessness, insecurity, reduced self-esteem and shame of interviewees that the following chapter further analyses.

The alienation from the self experienced by research interviewees is expressed in their reduced power to counter a system of capitalist exploitation, a welfare system that infantilises them and holds them accountable for their living conditions despite their hard work, sacrifice and effort, a situation that they personally experienced in the form of reduced agency, shame, self-blaming, reduction of self-esteem and powerlessness.

The expectation of going through the education system to get into the labour market and then break the intergenerational transmission of poverty (i.e. the narrow approach to upward social mobility by *Prospera*) is problematic. Recent research shows that social mobility in Mexico is practically null. Accordingly, “*the social position is transmitted from parents to children with a significant frequency among both those who are at the base and at the top of the socio-economic pyramid.*” (Delajara et al., 2018: 25). That is, “*the issue of social mobility in Mexico can be summarised as follows: those that are born poor will remain poor, and those who are born rich will remain rich.*” (Delajara et al., 2018: 15). These findings echo the lived experience of research participants showing that it is not poverty that is inherited intergenerationally, but the structural inequalities that accumulate from one generation into the other.

The neoliberal ethos of self-reliance is at odds with people’s realisation of the self. In fact, such ethos exacerbates the alienation from oneself, by fuelling powerlessness, shame and self-blaming. This has a particularly damaging long-term effect for people in worse off material conditions. Accordingly, imposing such rationale through training via conditional money harmed the selves of people in poverty. The lived experience of poverty clashed with the imposition of self-reliance and resilience functional to capitalism, which increased shame and reduced self-esteem.

This promise of upward social mobility through hard work is “*fact checked*” by the life trajectories of people in poverty and their material living conditions, thus proving it ill equipped to explain and ultimately fight poverty. In fact, this logic increased the shame of people in poverty for not being able to live up to those expectations, worsened the perception of self-worth and ultimately drove people in worse off conditions further away from society. This is the material alienation from the self that beneficiaries navigated daily via a constant struggle to survive and provide for their households, the stigma and shame of poverty, and comply with a welfare system that casts them as ultimately responsible for a residue of the circulation of capital that is poverty.

People in rural areas found it more difficult to navigate poverty and welfare conditionalities; this in turn affected how they made ends meet. Notwithstanding, in both urban and rural areas, alienation from the self entailed a sense of despair in relation to what they could have accomplished yet were not able to, despite their hard work, sacrifices and efforts. While this is the motion of the material hardship and the relational symbolic rim of poverty from the vantage point of the self, the question then is about the type of social relations of people in poverty (promoted by *Prospera*), which is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter VII alienation from others

*“My family has taken advantage of work and also of what we have earned while those others do not seize the opportunities that they have had, they don’t take advantage of their income and waste it in vices and unnecessary products. They are just not organized. Some of them have even fallen into addictions and can’t progress...”*  
*Ines, Rural area*

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the relation between social interaction and *Prospera*. The argument of this chapter is that the material and symbolic construing of poverty that *Prospera* advances alienates people from others. Alienation from others thus understood is a separation of individuals from communal links, a disruption of collectivity and reduced participation in society in meaningful and fulfilling ways. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question: *To what extent does Prospera promote internal division among its beneficiaries and within the broader society?* To that end, it explains the forms in which the material and symbolic construing of poverty drive disrespect, lack of voice, humiliation and isolation.

The core analysis of this chapter focuses on the ways in which *Prospera* alienates the “*social-being*” of its beneficiaries. It draws from the literature of alienation from fellow humans (Marx, 2013) to analyse interviewees’ experience of human relations in order to underpin the analysis of a life in poverty. This analysis develops in relation to the circulation of capital, drawing upon discussions of the material and symbolic realms of a life in poverty (Lister, 2004). It starts by analysing how the Mexican government, through *Prospera*, has used symbolic violence to train beneficiaries about their role in society and the importance of power dynamics to maintain certain social order. That establishes the basis for the embeddedness of the “*deservingness*” rationale in people’s dealings with others, which is the core analysis of the second section. *Prospera* then requires beneficiaries to enact such rationale onto

other beneficiaries. It does it by creating certain spaces of socialisation (talks, workshops, beneficiary gatherings) wherein some beneficiaries with more symbolic power (spokespeople) enact the unbalanced shares of power (capacity to sign attendance sheets) by shaming (reading aloud names of 'debtors') and "othering" non-compliant beneficiaries (identifying them by name during meetings/workshops and reporting). Then it analyses the resulting reconfiguration of social interactions among beneficiaries and between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The final section discusses the core arguments, main findings and relevance to alienation.

## **7.1. Altered social dynamics**

This section investigates the mechanisms through which *Prospera* altered social dynamics. It analyses how *Prospera* aligns beneficiaries' interactions with the logic of the "neoliberal subject" (Chandler and Reid, 2016) and reasserts a "welfarised agency" that suits a social interaction prone to competition, resilience and self-reliance. It builds on the literature of social control (Hevia, 2007, 2009, 2010) social networks (Lomnitz, 1977, 1988; Lomnitz and Sheinbaum, 2011), unequal power relations experienced in poverty (Lister, 2004; 2010), symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990; 2001) "othering" (Tyler, 2013) and "deservingness" discourses (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) to illuminate the experiences of social control by *Prospera*. It first analyses the use of symbolic violence by *Prospera* as a mechanism to maintain a type of social order that suits its functioning. Then it investigates the material and symbolic construing of poverty advanced by *Prospera* and reflected in the logic of "deservingness". The third section analyses how *Prospera* trains its beneficiaries to "other" and "shame" non-compliant households. The last section discusses the relevance to alienation.

### *7.1.1. Symbolic violence*

Symbolic violence is "imperceptible and invisible even to its victims" (Bourdieu, 2001: 1), it is hard to contest, and it embeds through complicity. *Prospera* requested complicity from its beneficiaries and expected a behavioural change. Irene explained the responsibility of beneficiary spokespeople towards the *Prospera* programme:

*"The spokespersons have the responsibility to tell the programme if a beneficiary is not complying with the co-responsibilities such as not attending doctors' appointments or the workshops... There are attendance sheets often filled out by them [spokespersons]..." Irene, beneficiary, urban area*

Irene's words underscore the symbolic power granted by the government to beneficiaries, a process purposefully orchestrated through the rotating system of spokesperson, as explained in chapter two. Through this system, *Prospera* has established an effective "on the ground" surveillance and - perhaps more importantly - a way for beneficiaries to gain official recognition of their performance. Through those small shares in power, *Prospera* has obtained the complicity of its beneficiaries.

Such complicity - and as such compliance - is facilitated through the cash transfers that are needed to alleviate some of beneficiaries' basic needs. By asserting complicity, the programme also reduces contention. However, this is possible only because structures of power are not visible in plain sight. As the words of a director of a health care centre illustrate:

*"Every programme that involves the government providing any kind of support, either food assistance, economic, education or health support... should generate beneficiaries' participation... If they are not given those co-responsibilities they start generating a population that feels entitled to rights, and they start demanding without giving anything back..." practitioner, health care professional*

Jose's words are a reflection of the "deservingness" logic and the rationale through which the reward and punishment mechanism embeds to train beneficiaries, as chapter six analysed. Accordingly, "the subjective misrecognition of the meanings associated with a particular action, practice or ritual can become a necessary condition for symbolic violence." (Thapar-Björkert, 2016: 150). The words of Jose are clear misrecognitions of the dynamics of power that conceal the diminishing of people's

agency to counter the functioning and structuring of inequalities on which *Prospera* rests.

In the case of beneficiaries of *Prospera*, the power imbalances vis-à-vis service providers creates a misrecognition wherein the carrot and stick are barely distinguishable. As such, conditional cash transfers are a mechanism that enables the misrecognition of poverty, thus rendering those in poverty responsible for it themselves. Alice, another promoter of *Prospera*, put it clearly:

*"I believe that we have to educate [beneficiaries], organise those values that have been lost, that have been left behind, and I think that by recovering those values we can build a better society..." practitioner, promoter of Prospera*

The reference to an alternative society based on values upheld by the "us" of Alice, entails an ostracism of "them", the beneficiaries. According to Alice, it is all about teaching "them" the standards of "us". This bears worrisome similarities to the process of "othering" that "denies them their complex humanity and subjectivity" (Lister, 2010: 102) that occurs largely because of the intricate welfare provision and stringent conditionality (Wright et al., 2011) that the following section further investigates. Chapter six analysed the process of "othering" from the vantage point of the self and its internalisation through self-discipline, but the words of Alice illuminate the relevance of "othering" from the vantage point of the social-being. Additionally, her words reflect a series of social practices among a group of people with greater power that discursively and in practice try to underplay the asymmetries of power in relation to people in a relative subordinate position, a strategy known as condescension.

Together, complicity, condescension and misrecognition tighten the grip of the symbolic violence exercised by the *Prospera* programme through conditionalities and via government officials. The symbolic violence experienced by research participants advanced the material and symbolic construing of poverty that reduced their collective agency, an effect which was manifested in isolation and lack of voice. This alienated

beneficiaries' capacity to organise, work together and raise their collective voice against the system of *Prospera*. As evidenced in chapter five, the strategies to make ends meet add up to the complexities of navigating the welfare state. Accordingly, the economic conditions in Mexico render people in poverty's hard work and effort (inside and outside the labour market) insufficient to escape poverty, which echoes findings around the "*poverty of resources*" (de la Rocha, 2004). To top that, "*falling incomes and rising poverty are also eroding the capacity of poor people to be part of social networks of support, leaving them unable to engage in and maintain social exchange*" (de la Rocha, 2003: 26). Moreover, the welfare system in Mexico tightens the grip of eroding social networks by deploying shame as a control tool, as the following sections analyse.

What is more, the institutional deployment of the "*deservingness*" rationale via conditions attached to benefits establishes the basis for the internalisation of a particular type of agency that rests on self-attributing personal worth according to compliance, resilience and behavioural adaptation, allegedly cornerstones of poverty alleviation. What is yet to be analysed is the role of the "*deservingness*" rationale embedded in the enactment of self-reliance and "*othering*" among beneficiaries and ultimately onto other people in poverty, which is the focus of the next section.

### *7.1.2. Material and symbolic construing of poverty: the logic of "deservingness"*

As analysed in chapter six, *Prospera* has relied on the embeddedness of self-reliance for its smooth operation on the ground. In addition, it has reproduced a narrative of success around its recipients to ascertain its social relevance and economic viability. These two together have served to advance a particular type of agency that mirrors the "*neoliberal-subject*" (Chandler and Reid, 2016). In this, beneficiaries are portrayed as fully capable individuals who -provided they are trained, educated and shaped accordingly - suffer but resist, forfeit but adapt, lack but cope, weaken but demonstrate self-reliance. This "*neoliberalised agency*" internalised through the "*deservingness*" rationale of the welfare system erodes the realisation of the self socially, and as such alienates the collective



from society, as showed in what follows. Alienation from oneself might be seen as a platform from which alienation from others builds.

The Mexican government has used success stories of some beneficiaries (Prospera, 2017) on the one hand to justify government expenditure and on the other to underscore the characteristics (values, behaviours, attitudes, aspirations) of “*deserving beneficiaries*”. In his concluding remarks of a dialogue with beneficiaries of *Prospera* in February 2017, the then President of Mexico Enrique Peña Nieto stated (Presidencia, 2018: 5):

*“We want all of you to have a better future. We want you to be part of a successful Mexico, a prosperous Mexico and a Mexico where the youth have a great opportunity to build their own success story.”*

This extract of a presidential speech addressed to beneficiaries of *Prospera* (Gobierno de la Republica, 2017) underscores the use of a “*success-failure*” narrative in the programme that frames beneficiaries in terms of how capable they are of exiting poverty. In doing so, the President of Mexico emphasises the voice of the “*successful*” at the expense of the voice of the “*failing*” beneficiaries. The government defines unilaterally its position of authority over the “*others*”, the “*unsuccessful*” beneficiaries. Symbolically, the government appears to be supporting the development of those beneficiaries referred to in the speech. Notwithstanding, such infantilising and condescending effort to create proximity with beneficiaries (narrative, discourse, trajectories) underplays power imbalances between “*them*” and “*us*”.

However, this is pernicious because it promotes social dynamics of disrespect based on how people’s living conditions are construed. Particularly, it creates unequal power relations that contribute to domination and the reproduction of the *status-quo*. Cristina, from an urban area, put it clearly:

*"This one time I was working for a public servant in his house with his family... They took advantage of me because I worked for them but they didn't pay me. The months went by and I had to tell him and his wife that I cleaned their house, I cooked for them, everything. So that day they were eating so I waited till they finished eating and I told them, "Look I need you to tell me what is going on with my job, because I'm working here and I'm not being paid, and my children don't have shoes, I don't have enough money to pay the rent..." I really felt bad, it was a complete lack of respect, and yeah one is discriminated against for not having knowledge, because they see you poor and humble without having the courage to defend yourself... I felt a lot of anger, you have no idea how bad I felt... Imagine when I got home, with my children and just looking at them, imagine not having enough money to buy even 1kg of tortilla, it is a huge powerlessness... My children didn't have anything to eat not because their mother was lazy but because someone had taken advantage of their mother..." Cristina, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Cristina underscore how appearing to "be poor" and the power hierarchies experienced in poverty are related to how people are approached, treated and ultimately people's satisfaction of needs. Chapter five analysed the extent to which *Prospera* alienates beneficiaries' time. However, a further analysis of the data highlights that the pressure of time for the satisfaction of needs presents itself as a burden that relates to the unequal power relations experienced by people in poverty. Similarly, Ines explained how her family was humiliated because of their living conditions:

*"And then the occasion when my son was discriminated against by the teacher. I mean, the teacher humiliated my son because of his humble background. She told him, well, my son is playful and they were rehearsing some activity for an event, and the teacher humiliated him for his humble background; she told him, 'You think a lot of yourself, right? But you are poor!' ... That was very painful for me, when he told me that, he was crying..." Ines, beneficiary, rural area*

Ines' son experienced what Sennett and Cobb called "*a game of disguising power*" wherein a figure of authority restricts "*the freedom of someone in his charge by replacing the problem of limited freedom with the problem of the inferior person asserting his own dignity*". (Sennett and Cobb, 1977: 89). In this, however, dignity was framed in terms of the labels and ultimately (dis)values attached to poverty. The disrespect that rests on the material conditions is particularly acute. This is because it intersects with the hierarchical positions in society and the unequal power relations that separate people in poverty from the rest of the society in terms of how they are treated, how they participate in the labour market, their access to leisure time activities and the places they can and are able to visit. Similarly, Mafe explained that living in a rural community has meant disrespect and a differential treatment in government entities:

*Mafe*            *When I go to the health clinic... you feel desperate because often people would get there after you and they get to see the doctor before you and you feel anger... and you can't even say anything, people there are more, ehm, they won't even say, 'Go first because you came from further away'*

*Gerardo*       *And why do you think that happens?*

*Mafe*            *Because they say: 'They belong elsewhere ('Zapotal'), they can wait'. And they perceive us as scroungers, and because if you are a scrounger then you have to wait... they call us to the doctor's office when they want to...*

*beneficiary, rural area*

Mafe's words emphasise that poverty is often a frustrating and demoralising experience wherein social interactions are imbued with disrespect, abuse and unequal power relations. As chapter six demonstrated, tensions between the material conditions of a life in poverty and the expectations of a better life through hard work demoralise and weaken the self-esteem. However, here Mafe provides a different angle to poverty, one where unequal power relations characterise day-to-day interactions

wherein “*society forces [people] to translate social position into terms of personal worth*” (Sennett and Cobb, 1977: 141).

The attribution of poverty to personal failure transgresses the self because it entails condemning people’s behaviours through shame. A residue of this is the “*deservingness*” discourse that conveys people in poverty as people who have “*failed*”, which promotes isolation, reduces social capital and builds barriers around people on the receiving end of shame and “*othering*”.

Yet, through workshops, talks and health checks, *Prospera* insists that beneficiaries need to invest in their human capital to improve their living conditions and thus stop the disrespect they experience. It promotes the aspiration for better living conditions as a measure of personal achievement. Through the channels of a discourse constructed around poverty, the stigma attached to it separates people based on worth, of which material living standards are increasingly the yardstick. This material and symbolic construing of poverty advances the dream of achieving dignity through upward mobility (Sennett and Cobb, 1977).

The logic behind “*deservingness*” rests on dividing compliant from non-compliant beneficiaries. *Prospera* transfers money to make sure beneficiaries internalise it via training and socialisation with government officials and other beneficiaries and their households.

### *7.1.3. Shaming indoctrination*

Whether intentionally or not, when suspending or taking beneficiaries out of the programme the government divides people in poverty into deserving (beneficiaries) and non-deserving (non-beneficiaries); and classifies beneficiaries into hard (compliant) and lazy (non-compliant) workers. This narrative of social provision casts beneficiaries as responsible for remaining in poverty, thus enacting shame over benefit claimants. This discourse has a strong grip, particularly because it provides a “*shortcut*” for explaining complex social dynamics and it appeals to the “*common sense*” of people’s

capacity to change their own living conditions through hard work. *Prospera* indoctrinates beneficiaries to shame other beneficiaries in an attempt to reassert compliance. Louisa provided an example of how spokespeople called beneficiaries' names in front of neighbours, for not giving the "voluntary" donations to the health clinic:

*"If you don't give money [to the health clinic], they put you on the list, and we have a meeting where they call your name so that you give [money]... It is a list of 'debtors'... and every time we have a meeting they are calling your name and calling your name ... The spokesperson is the one who reads the names aloud..." Louisa, beneficiary, rural area*

In this, Louisa provides a look into the intricate interaction of *Prospera* with health care centres and beneficiaries. Chapter five has already analysed the impact of *Prospera* on disposing of beneficiaries' income through health clinics and schools. However, the words of Louisa underscore the use of "voluntary" donations as a sign of social worth where not supporting the health care entails punishment. Similarly, Lorena also explained how being shamed damaged her interactions in the community:

*"Yeah, they put your children's name in the list outside the classroom, and say your name during the parent meetings at school. Then each meeting, they say your name and every neighbour will find out that you have not paid. But it is not like you didn't want to pay, maybe it was because you had to get the school supplies and uniforms, and perhaps you only owe them \$200 [£7.80] or \$100 [£3.90] [Mexican] pesos or something, and they expose you in front of everyone! And it's really embarrassing! 'Cause they say, 'Oh it was you! what a pity!' But it is like that, what can you do?..." Lorena, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Lorena underscore the shame attached to a life in poverty. Chapter six has already analysed the role of compliance by beneficiaries as a way to avoid shame. However, from the vantage point of social interaction, institutional

shaming represents an indoctrination mechanism deployed by *Prospera*. In the case of Louisa, other beneficiaries enacted the logic of “*deservingness*” and shamed those who did not comply, which hampered social cohesion. The internalisation of self-reliance and resilience coupled with the logic of “*deservingness*” normalises shaming as a form of social interaction.

Via the reproduction of the “*success-failure*” narrative and the promotion of the “*deservingness*” discourse, *Prospera* sets a confrontation, in the collective imaginary of society, of beneficiaries against each other by advancing a contrast between compliant and non-compliant households despite their similar living conditions. This parallels the contrast between the “*deficit view*” (CLASS, 2015) and the “*aspiration nation*” approach of the government coalition under Prime Minister David Cameron in Britain (Spohrer, 2017) that still echoes to the present day. Mary explained her view about the link between welfare dependency and non-compliant beneficiaries:

*“If the programme is used for the reasons it was created, then I think it is ok... The problem is that people get used to the government giving them... and if it [the government] doesn't [give them] they don't do anything and that is the problem... And I think it's about values, because I say that if you are selfish and you are only thinking about yourself, then you don't care, if they give you the money you spend it all. Because no one else matters; you don't care about your family and you don't mind if your children have anything to eat, if they have shoes, or if they have pocket money to go to school...”* Mary, beneficiary, urban area

Mary applied the logic of “*welfare dependency*” to describe “*the other*”, the non-compliant beneficiaries that allegedly resort to feckless attitudes as a way of “*escaping*” from their reality. The words of Mary reflect the “*othering*” of people in poverty to explain the attitudes and ultimately the lives of other people in poverty.

This echoes research carried out in Britain where the “*undeserving poor*” were those thought “*to be claiming benefits illegitimately or to be engaging in inappropriate*

*consumption habits (for example, spending money on alcohol, cigarettes or drugs rather than on food for their children)" (Shildrick et al., 2012: 168). However, in this, the process of "othering" rests on suspicion, distrust and fear in their interaction with their neighbours. With the internalisation and socialisation of the logic of "deservingness" that *Prospera* advances, rather than sympathy and organisation through common interests, people confront each other, become suspicious and fearful of "deviant" households.*

The direct link between *Prospera*, shaming indoctrination and people's internalisation of "othering" and shaming becomes more evident in the light of practitioners' take on poverty and the training they provide. Dr. Francisco, in charge of a health clinic, explains his reasoning:

*Gerardo*            *There have been talks about something called the 'culture of poverty'; do you think there is such a thing?*

*Dr. Francisco*    *Yes*

*Gerardo*            *And how would you describe it?*

*Dr. Francisco*    *The "poor" person here in Mexico is fortunate, because he knows that it is him who people will look after, on which the political system subsists... they know that the government has the obligation to look after them. However, they don't feel the obligation of finding a job, or getting an occupation..."*

The words of Dr. Henry bear similarities to the rhetoric that surrounds benefit claimants in the UK (Patrick, 2017) which stigmatises people in poverty, makes them responsible for their living conditions, and pushes forward the logic of "deservingness". However, *Prospera* takes it a step further and rewards spokespeople and beneficiaries for enacting the "deservingness" logic onto other beneficiaries. During a workshop with spokespeople of different municipalities in an urban area, promoters of *Prospera* trained them on fighting corruption:

*Promoter* From this semester onwards [second half of 2016] spokespeople will also hold the role of 'civicus' [vigilant citizens of social comptrollership]. 'Civicus' are monitoring committees of the Social Comptrollership of Mexico. Your participation is very important. What are you going to be in charge of? You are going to be in charge of checking anomalies and acts of corruption that could exist within your neighbourhoods... Let me give you an example. These two months are very important, because they are the months of the complaint... and what is it going to be about? That you have to clearly identify those families that don't need the programme anymore. And how could you identify them? (requests participation from attendees)

*Attendee  
spokesperson* Maybe because we are neighbours, we can notice their real economic solvency?

*Promoter* But what is happening? Have you denounced families that don't need the support?

*All attendees* No!

*Promoter* Why?

*Attendee  
spokesperson* 'Cause that would be conflict, wouldn't it?



*Promoter*      *Do you consider that could create a conflict? But no, because it is an anonymous complaint, you are not putting down your name. Plus, it would not necessarily be you as the neighbour who made the complaint. It could be anyone else. Maybe a person that has the programme, that went to that house for some other reason and noticed it [that they did not need the programme]... To file the complaint the information that is required... is the full name of the person that I am going to denounce, address, the folio if you have it... and also explaining the reason why you are denouncing... [you have to] provide an e-mail so that you can also receive an answer and so everything is transparent and you see that your complaint proceeded..."*

This extract of a one-hour workshop illustrates the type of social dynamics nurtured by *Prospera*. In an attempt to address claims that a few beneficiaries do not use the programme correctly (Leroy et al., 2008) and complaints regarding people receiving benefits from the programme without needing it, the government decided to deploy its spokespeople to prevent that from happening, as shown above. However, this new task – which increases the burden of the programme on spokespeople – opens a window for the use and abuse of spokespeople’s formal and symbolic power, their position as intermediaries and access to knowledge and privileged position compared with other beneficiaries. More importantly, this extract demonstrates a mechanism through which *Prospera* rewards spokespeople with institutional recognition (i.e. the role of “*civicus*”), for enacting the “*deservingness*” logic onto other beneficiaries via denouncement of the “*others*”, the “*scroungers*” that abuse the system or do not comply with their conditionalities.

A research study carried out in Britain concluded that the “*others*” -“*the undeserving poor*” - *are difficult to locate, empirically...*” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:169). However, in the case of *Prospera*, it rewards its beneficiaries for providing

a name, surname and a full address of these “others”, the “undeserving” ones. This open call to locate the “others” breaches trust and sets the ground for suspicion to arise among beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries struggling to keep up with their conditionalities and those who are in appearance better off (often because of indebtedness) fear spokespeople and fellow beneficiaries who might at any point “*blow the whistle*” on them. The enactment of the “*deservingness*” logic through “*othering*” in this case operates via suspicion and fear that alienate beneficiaries from each other. Accordingly, the crafting of the neoliberal state operates via the creation of “*social insecurity*” in the political body of society (Wacquant, 2010: 197) that is fuelled through the spread of fears against groups of society constructed as threats to society. In the case of *Prospera*, the construction of fear and suspicion against fellow neighbours and parents of one’s own children’s friends become a stepping stone of social interaction inasmuch as it requires beneficiaries to use those fears and suspicions to locate and punish non-compliant households.

“*The set of culturally prescribed rules*” (Lomnitz, 1988: 51) through which social networks operate, implies that “*there is an unwritten code of honor whose infringement is penalized by “shame”*” (Lomnitz, 1988: 51). By embedding its underpinning economic rationale and concomitant assumptions about the inheritance of poverty (via workshops, talks and health clinic visits), *Prospera* uses this unwritten code among programme beneficiaries to ensure any sort of infringement is penalised via that same logic of shame. However, this is a different type of shame; one that rests on attributing personal worth to one’s own material living conditions that clashes with people’s sense of self-worth and self-respect (analysed in chapter six), despite their hard work and effort (analysed in chapter five). The residue of this is a less cohesive set of social networks conformed by individuals in receipt of welfare support, who are shamed and pitched against each other to receive their benefits in an attempt to train them and make sure they aspire to the ever inaccessible promise of social mobility on which *Prospera* rests.

#### 7.1.4. *Relevance to alienation*

Through the channels of symbolic violence, *Prospera* gains legitimacy and complicity, reduces contention and with the support of practitioners it is able to misrecognise the causes of poverty. This in turn advances a particular understanding of people in poverty in relation to welfare provision that renders individuals responsible for a societal problem. In particular, it separates “*deserving*” from “*undeserving*” beneficiaries on which “*othering*” rests. The institutional indoctrination of shaming coupled with the internalisation of self-reliance and resilience, advances a logic of “*deservingness*”. *Prospera* trains beneficiaries and in fact rewards them for shaming, “*othering*” and ultimately deploying the logic of “*deservingness*” onto other beneficiaries, which promotes disrespect, discrimination, isolation and reduced social cohesion. The residue of this is a “*welfarised agency*” that pitches people in poverty against each other, as the following section investigates.

### **7.2. *Prospera* and the reconfiguration of social dynamics**

This section analyses the reconfiguration of social relations promoted and facilitated by *Prospera*. The argument is that the dynamics around conditionalities that embed in the unequal distribution of resources negatively interplays with how people in poverty interact socially as well as with their surviving strategies. It first investigates the asymmetries of power it creates among beneficiaries, in particular, the reduced social cohesion fostered by the dynamics of conditionalities. It then analyses the process of “*othering*” and confrontation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in urban and rural areas. Particular attention goes to how people deploy the logic of “*deservingness*” onto other people in poverty and the specific forms of confrontation nurtured due to conditional money. Then it investigates the form in which *Prospera* alters household dynamics. The last part discusses the relevance to alienation.

### *7.2.1. Asymmetries of power: interactions among beneficiaries*

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Prospera* altered social dynamics. In the case of its beneficiaries, it did this by enhancing asymmetries of power present in the localities. The role of spokespeople has been paramount for the smooth operation of *Prospera* across the country. As chapter two discussed, the programme distributed all sorts of information and summoned beneficiaries through the support of voluntary spokespeople who wielded more formal and symbolic power than other beneficiaries. However, spokespeople often faced the conundrum of having to report other beneficiaries while at the same time making sure the collective interests of beneficiaries prevailed. Adela explained her role as a spokesperson:

*Gerardo*    *What type of responsibilities do you have as a spokesperson?*

*Adela*      *I have many responsibilities. I have the responsibility that if the programme calls me then I have to go, because if I don't, the beneficiaries under my responsibility will not know what the meeting was all about...*

*beneficiary, spokesperson, rural area*

For Adela, her benefits come with big responsibilities. Not only in terms of providing for her own family and complying with her co-responsibilities, but also in terms of being an intermediary between *Prospera* and all the beneficiaries she looks after as spokesperson. Adela also highlighted her role of organising constant meetings and events with beneficiaries and coordinating them by phone and *Whatsapp*. Nevertheless, proving her efficiency as spokesperson to *Prospera* often entailed reporting the non-compliant beneficiaries. While not reporting does not result in losing her benefits, spokespeople felt compelled to do it in order to prove themselves worthy citizens who receive but also give back to the system. Diana explained it in her own words:

*“The government doesn’t give you anything for free. Really, the government doesn’t give you anything for free. You have to work as well. I’m a spokesperson and I have 20 beneficiaries under my responsibility. If they call me to a meeting, whether they are coming from Xalapa or from Mexico City, I have to go... and anyone who doesn’t go to work, will be removed from the programme....” Diana, beneficiary, spokesperson, urban area*

Diana’s opinion is a clear manifestation of the internalisation of the self-reliance rationale that she has socialised with programme representatives and other beneficiaries for the past 13 years that she has been a benefit claimant. As such, the logic of “*deservingness*” embeds through the channels of symbolic violence that operate with the complicity of welfare recipients. Adela and Diana felt obliged to report to the programme non-compliant beneficiaries and collaborate with government officials, even if that entailed a neighbour having her benefits reduced or taken away.

The force of complicity, promoted through the “*deservingness*” rationale pushed by *Prospera*, diminished social cohesion among beneficiaries. What is more, the shame produced by reading the names of “*debtors*” aloud hindered people’s self-esteem and ultimately pushed beneficiaries further away from their neighbours. In those cases, “*the behaviour induced by shame can even reinforce inequalities and strengthen stratification in society.*” (Walker, 2014: 37). As such, complicity permits alienation to operate via the welfare system. Nevertheless, spokespeople were well aware of their neighbours’ needs and the problems they faced daily, and as such they wanted to support them. As expressed by Nancy:

*“If I have under my watch a mother or two that are coming to this junior high school, then as a spokesperson I have to go there... And if the children are not getting their school benefits, it is my responsibility to talk to the director to check why that was the case; that is my responsibility as a spokesperson...” Nancy, beneficiary, rural area*

Nancy's words highlight the sense of duty towards other beneficiaries. However, the case of Nancy was a reflection of the often-conflicting responsibility of supporting beneficiaries while also fulfilling the role as spokesperson, which in the end was framed in terms of her role as an intermediary of *Prospera*. Nevertheless, despite her efforts to support other beneficiaries, Nancy was bound to comply with both her conditionalities and her role as spokesperson which to a large extent rested on reporting non-compliance.

In this contradictory struggle between helping and surveilling, spokespeople often find themselves forced to read aloud the names of the “*debtors*” and report non-attendance of beneficiaries to schools and health clinics. What tilts the balance to surveillance and denunciation is the burden of unsatisfied needs of their own households, which pushes them to rely on their benefits from *Prospera*.

While this situation increases spokespeople's symbolic power vis-à-vis beneficiaries, it also might increase spokespeople's guilt towards neighbours who are highly likely to be experiencing similar difficulties to them. In turn, this harms their ties with those who cannot afford the payments or struggle to comply with conditionalities. Once their role as spokespeople comes to an end, they pass their role onto other beneficiaries and are left alienated from those who they directly affected. Furthermore, the bond with those affected by their very performance might in fact be damaged beyond repair, leaving beneficiaries who struggle the most with even fewer ties with the community. For instance, Ruth described the conflict she experienced with spokespeople because of the tension between complying with *Prospera* and satisfying her household's basic needs. Ruth is a mother of three and lives in a capital city; she explained how her household negotiated scarce resources:

*“If one of us [within the household] doesn't have shoes, he must endure until we have a little bit more money to be able to buy the shoes. But first, we need to sacrifice all of that in order to buy food that is essential and such things as electricity and water that we need to pay...” Ruth, beneficiary, urban area*

Ruth tells a common story among beneficiaries regarding how some basic needs are postponed in an attempt to satisfy some other equally pressing needs. Nevertheless, one of the requirements of *Prospera* is for children to have shoes and the school uniform in good condition. Otherwise, the programme can suspend or even cancel the support. Margarita, a programme spokesperson, explained how she did it:

*"I have to go to the schools and see if the children in the Prospera programme have shoes, uniforms in good condition... and all of that. And if a kid doesn't comply with that, one has to report them because that is why we receive the programme" Margarita, beneficiary and spokesperson, rural area*

Margarita complied with her responsibilities as spokesperson and informed *Prospera*, which then enforced the regulations on those parents who "*neglected*" their children's need for clothing. However, the very basic need of Ruth's children's clothing often had to be postponed for the needs of food and shelter. Thus, she was left with a reduction in her benefits, the stigma of being a non-compliant beneficiary, and a diminished relationship with that spokesperson. Jenny explained the particularities of how spokespersons reported non-compliant beneficiaries:

*Gerardo How does it work?*

*Jenny Yeah, they [spokespersons] have to tell them [programme representatives]... that people are not complying with their responsibilities; that they are not attending health checks, not attending workshops.*

*Gerardo But how do the spokespersons know if someone didn't make it to the workshops and talks?*

*Jenny Because they have these lists... they make these lists, or the health clinic, so that we have to have attendance in all of those lists.*

*Gerardo* So what do they [spokespersons] do with the lists?

*Jenny* They have to inform programme representatives...

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Jenny emphasise the unequal distribution of power promoted by *Prospera*. In particular, they reflect the real power that spokespersons have when verifying the compliance of conditionalities by other beneficiaries. Similarly, Betty referred to another key role of spokespersons: follow up the delivery of benefits:

*"If you do not go to the delivery of pay slips then you have to go all the way to 'Las Trancas' and get your slip... But then the spokespersons get all rude, they don't give you the information. And if you miss one of those appointments, and talks and the lot, then you get a deduction [in the benefits]..." Betty, beneficiary, urban area.*

Betty referred to the unequal power relations among beneficiaries. Spokespeople have access to relevant information (time and place for the delivery of pay slips; schedule of workshops and talks) that directly affect other beneficiaries. Furthermore, her words reflected the unequal dynamics that she and other beneficiaries experienced in their interaction with spokespersons who function as intermediaries between them and *Prospera*. For instance, Elba explained how she has relied on spokespeople when she does not have enough money to pay the dues to the *Prospera* programme:

*Gerardo* Have you ever been in a position in which you have to give money to the *Prospera* programme and you don't have enough?

*Elba* Yeah

*Gerardo* And what do you do in those cases?



*Elba*                    *I tell the spokesperson that receives the money to give me some time. There are four spokespeople because there are four groups and I'm in the second one.*

*beneficiary, urban area*

Elba illustrated the frequent favour she asks of spokespeople to “*keep her on hold*” until she has enough money to pay, which - building on the discussion in chapter five - is a manifestation of the many complexities she has faced to negotiate poverty. More specifically, her words are a reflection of the type of “*welfarised*” agency promoted and ultimately imposed by *Prospera* onto its beneficiaries. An agency wherein not only do beneficiaries have to make ends meet but also have to make an extra effort to stay in the programme and thus demonstrate they are worthy of support even if that entails “*being in debt*” with programme intermediaries. When asked about the reaction of that spokesperson to her request, Elena explained:

*Gerardo*            *And what do they tell you?*

*Elena*                *That I have to give the money as soon as possible. And yeah, I do everything I can, and I send her the money to her house.*

*Gerardo*            *And have you?*

*Elena*                *Yeah, because at times there's just not enough money to give away...*  
*beneficiary, rural area*

Elena's insights illuminated the new channels of interaction among beneficiaries created through and because of *Prospera*. However, the social dynamics among beneficiaries in these new spaces of interaction (workshops, talks and beneficiary gatherings), are grounded in unequal power dynamics.

As Ruth, Elba, Betty and Elena exemplified, spokespeople received shares of power from *Prospera* and were even in a position to directly receive money from beneficiaries. This granted spokespeople symbolic power (authority with regard to other beneficiaries) and formal power (deciding whether or not to put their names down the “*debtors*” list) that weakened social bonds between spokespeople and other beneficiaries. Interviewees’ recollections exemplify how this has harmed their position in relation also to other beneficiaries in such a way that they constantly felt worried and anxious about not being able to pay back on time or comply with conditionalities. This unequal interaction left beneficiaries vulnerable to shaming by other beneficiaries and pushed them away from the community. Accordingly, Irene described the interaction between beneficiaries and spokespeople:

*Gerardo*     *Could you explain to me, how do spokespeople know when beneficiaries attend workshops or not?*

*Irene*        *Because they have those lists... that are elaborated by them [spokespeople]... that means that we have to have attendance in every single list...*

*Gerardo*     *So, if a spokesperson hears that a given beneficiary doesn’t comply with the attendance requirement, what does she have to do?*

*Irene*        *Well, she has to report [the non-attendance] to the person that comes here to give us the workshop [Prospera’s representative]...  
beneficiary, urban area*

Irene referred to the surveillance responsibilities of spokespeople over beneficiaries through the different attendance sheets they must sign. That is the case for workshops and talks, as well as compliance with school conditionalities. Interestingly, *Prospera* has underscored the increased communication and interaction among beneficiaries as an example of the social cohesion it promotes (*Prospera*, 2016). Accordingly, “*the Program creates groups of united women via the cooperation ties that*

*start from the program and extend to other areas of their lives...” (Cruz et al., 2006: 15). However, for many that has not really been the case. Ines illustrated the change in behaviour from some of her neighbours when they became spokespeople and in particular the negative impact on how they interacted with her:*

*Ines           ... Because once they are there, [as spokespeople], they don't help you anymore. At times they just don't, don't want to give you a hand in things you need.*

*Gerardo      Like what?*

*Ines           Well if you sometimes have to go somewhere or do something, you say 'look this is the reason', and at times they don't want to help you even when they clearly know that you can't go [to workshops, talks, meetings] because you just can't.*

*Gerardo      So, what do they do then?*

*Ines           They tell you that you have to go, that it is mandatory, because everyone else is attending ...*

*beneficiary, rural area*

Ines's words underscored the change in behaviour and ultimately the change of interactions among beneficiaries because of the power imbalances that *Pospera* generates. Similarly, Monica referred to the treatment she received from other spokespeople, which often has been that of disrespect and lack of empathy towards her economic situation and difficulties in accommodating conditionalities:

*“If you can't make it to the meeting where they give you the payment slips then you have to go all the way to 'Las Trancas' [about an hour and a half away from where she lives] to get your payment... But then the spokespeople get all rude, they give you the information last minute. And if you miss those appointments or the talks or any*

*of that you get a deduction... spokespeople jot down your name and pass on that list [to Prospera's representatives]..." Monica, beneficiary, urban area*

Monica's experience exemplified the vulnerability of beneficiaries in their interaction with spokespeople. As with Ruth, Jenny, Betty, Elena, Irene and Ines, the case of Monica showed the forms in which the disparities in the distribution of power, promoted and facilitated by *Prospera*, enhanced the alienation people in poverty experienced from other people.

Anthropological and sociological studies have shown the importance of social territories (Lomnitz, 1977; de la Rocha, 2003; 2004; 2008a; 2008b) and social networks (de la Rocha, 2003) wherein reciprocity of relationships were at the very core of survival. In a similar vein, but from a critical appraisal, research has shown the risk of relying on such a "survival kit", particularly in times of economic turmoil, to navigate poverty that can lead to "the erosion of relationships of mutual help, solidarity and social exchange" (de la Rocha, 2003: 4). The growing pressure (economic and social) that represent a life in poverty, erodes cooperation and solidarity and increases social isolation. As per interviewees' recollections, *Prospera* furthers the erosion of the social fabric by overloading beneficiaries' reliance on kinship and family relationships to cope with the burdens of the programme (time and income), and by enacting on them the shame of poverty as an indoctrination tool.

Moreover, the spaces of interaction created by *Prospera* (workshops, talks) promoted instances of disrespect, fear and confrontation that hindered households that were already in a more vulnerable position. Cecilia exemplified how those power imbalances intertwined with government dynamics often at the expenses of beneficiaries' needs:

*Gerardo*     *Have you ever had a deduction from your benefits?*

*Cecilia* That time I got a deduction from my programme [benefits] because I didn't have a bathroom. And it was that very same spokesperson who got me the deduction.

*Gerardo* So, she jotted it down as non-attendance?

*Cecilia* She jotted down the non-attendance because of not having a bathroom. So, I went to 'Coatepec' [sectorial offices of Prospera] to check if that was valid and they told me that it wasn't, that [having] a bathroom didn't figure as a conditionality. So, I went to the health clinic with the doctor [to file a complaint], but because the doctor was very happy with the [expected] performance of that lady [spokesperson], I just couldn't do anything..."

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Cecilia underscored the perverse dynamics of power between government representatives and programme intermediaries that took place because of power asymmetries generated by *Prospera*. In turn, this resulted in Cecilia being on the receiving end of shame and a "deservingness" logic that weakened her position in relation to the health centre and spokespeople. In particular, her story emphasised how her living conditions were used by a fellow beneficiary to punish her. The material and symbolic construing of poverty put in motion the relation between the material hardships of not having a bathroom, the humiliation and disrespect she experienced as a result and the alienation from other people in poverty, in this case a spokesperson.

The power imbalances that *Prospera* promotes, facilitate the space for some spokespeople to display control and at times even air previous conflicts with some beneficiaries and thus abuse their power. Additionally, the words of Cecilia when she said "I just couldn't do anything" are a clear reflection of the powerlessness she experienced in the unequal power relations with other beneficiaries and government officials. This worsened her power to navigate poverty because her benefits in this

instance were cut in half, which speaks of her reduced power with regard to intermediaries of *Prospera*.

Furthermore, despite the existence of the “*right of audience*” to claim her reduced benefits back, explained in chapter two, this is simply out of Cecilia’s reach. The access to a “*right of audience*” would have entailed traveling a long distance (over 560 km round trip to Mexico City), investing a lot of time (an entire day for the journey there, the hearing, and to come back) plus the expenses attached to food, drink and commuting. Not only did this situation put her off even attempting to claim her benefits back, but it further diminished her relationship with that spokesperson and that doctor, who provided her and her household with health care.

Theories of social networks (Lomnitz 1988, 2011) have shown how “*in the marginal sector*” these “*function as a surrogate of social security system for individual survival. Within each network the type of exchange is symmetrical reciprocity of goods, services, and information.*” (Lomnitz, 1977: 187). *Prospera* disrupts these social networks by nurturing asymmetries of power among welfare recipients (spokespeople and beneficiaries); it breaches trust on which these social networks rest (Lomnitz, 1988) by requiring beneficiaries to locate the “*other*” to then be punished and shamed. Accordingly, the functioning of *Prospera* operates through shaming and enactment of the “*deservingness*” rationale of beneficiaries by other beneficiaries. The structural dynamics of *Prospera*, together with the social interactions it facilitates, weakens beneficiaries’ relations and as such alienates them from others.

### 7.2.2. Local dynamics: beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

As previously analysed, *Prospera* affected social dynamics. In the case of the interaction between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries it did this by advancing a particular construing of poverty that drives a type of agency that is at odds with their living conditions. Drawing from the findings in chapter five, *Prospera* advanced this via the “*deservingness*” rationale that beneficiaries enacted upon themselves. Compliance with conditionalities entailed internalisation of self-reliance and self-accountability, as the

previous two chapters showed. This in turn eased beneficiaries into enacting it upon their neighbours. Diana explained what in her opinion the difference between her household and other families was:

*“My family has taken advantage of the programme, of work and also of what we have earned while those others do not seize the opportunities that they have had, they don’t take advantage of their income and waste it in vices and unnecessary products. They are just not organised. Some of them have even fallen into addictions and can’t progress...” Diana, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Diana are a clear example of the “othering” used by interviewees to refer to other people in poverty. This has important parallels with the self-reliance and “deservingness” logic advanced by *Prospera* via its conditionalities. Diana’s words are a manifestation of the deployment of “othering” to stigmatise people in poverty and separate the “us”, hard-working people, from the “other” lazy, vicious and less capable ones. Accordingly, “societies define themselves with respect to shared ideals and ideal patterns of behaviour and differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘failed’ citizens, between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Anderson, 2013). Similarly, for Dany, her neighbours lack certain “values” required to be good parents:

*“It’s not that I am judging right? But sometimes those parents leave their children there without caring! They just leave them there with other people! And I think this really has to do with the value of responsibility, they just don’t have it... that’s why they live like that.” Dany, beneficiary, urban area*

For Dany, the dissolute way of living of “them” reflects their lack of responsibility, particularly in terms of parenting. This echoes CCT’s pre-conceived assumption about the need for people in poverty to increase their effort and sacrifice to provide for their children. Enacting self-reliance and the “deservingness” rationale onto others reasserts people’s sense of worth which in turn reduces social cohesion. As such, “Sacrifice... legitimizes a person’s view of himself as an individual... In setting you off

*as an individual, a virtuous person compared to less forceful others... it permits you to practice that most insidious and devastating form of self-righteousness where you, oppressed, in your anger, turn on others who are also oppressed rather than on those intangible, invisible, impersonal forces that have made you all vulnerable.*" (Sennett and Cobb, 1977: 140). As previously suggested, *Prospera* trains government officials and beneficiaries to use this logic to explain the living conditions of other people in poverty. Accordingly, Monica pinpointed the damage of "wasteful spending" of fellow neighbours:

*"They are there, starving! But they buy their brand clothes and their brand sneakers and they go all fancy and that, but they commute on foot..."* Monica, beneficiary, urban area

In her sarcastic depiction of other people in poverty (her neighbours across the street) Monica airs her distrust and suspicion of people sacrificing wellbeing in exchange for short-term "glamour". These are traces of a symbolic construing of poverty advanced by *Prospera* that stigmatises and "others" people struggling to navigate poverty. Interestingly, all interviewees when referring to the general causes of poverty, often referred to lack of jobs, reduced income and limited opportunities, as Betty put it:

*"This capitalist class, this class of rich people, they have what they have because they had access to a better education and way more benefits than a poor person; a poor person can't even afford education... Then people say, "Why doesn't Mexico move forward?" Well it is really because people don't have access..."* Betty, beneficiary, urban area.

However, when referring to the living conditions of their neighbours, they emphasised "ad-hominem" explanations of poverty, which in turn they used to place themselves apart from "the others", those less hard working people. According to Diana,



her neighbours can't escape poverty because they don't strive enough and lack family values:

*"Their problem is the lack of unity. You know? The mother lying down watching TV, then the children come home and she [the mother] says, 'Don't bother me, I'm watching the telly'; then the dad is out there drinking with his friends and the same thing, 'Don't bother me I'm with my friends'... Family union is very important, you know children are the reflex of the parents..." Diana, beneficiary, urban area*

This emphasises that while people recognised the structural constraints that impeded people from escaping poverty, in their interactions at community level and in particular with their close neighbours they blamed it on personality traits and lack of certain values, just as *Prospera* trained them. Research conducted in north-east England demonstrated that often people in poverty deploy this "othering" mechanism to condemn "the poor" and set themselves apart as more worthy citizens (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2013). However, also in those cases it was a response to fight "deservingness" discourses prevalent in western societies. In the case of Mexico, *Prospera* has pushed this discourse into its beneficiaries, as previously shown. The words of interviewees above correspond to the enactment of "othering" that might be a byproduct of exposure to *Prospera* for several years. Notwithstanding, the harms of *Prospera* in the larger community became more evident precisely in the most economically disadvantaged areas: rural communities.

*Prospera* makes no real effort to integrate beneficiaries with the community and boost social cohesion. Allegedly, the exception to this are the "faenas" in rural areas, where beneficiaries "voluntarily" clean, sweep and paint the streets, as chapter two explained. In fact, some research participants perceived them as a good opportunity to share with other beneficiaries, or to put in words of Lupe: "I think 'faenas' unite people..." Additionally, some interviewees shared the idea that "faenas" allowed them to keep their communities neat:

*“Doing the “faenas” is good, because we are cleaning so the community looks good...”*

*Cecilia, beneficiary, rural area*

Cecilia’s words emphasise the importance of taking care of their community. It has been argued that “faenas” as well as workshops and talks promote the empowerment of women because they allegedly allow them to take ownership of their living conditions (Adato, 2000). However, as discussed in chapter five and six, workshops and “faenas” reproduce gender roles and reflect the market rationale of self-reliance, while obscuring inequalities suffered in rural areas. Accordingly, households needed to adapt to the pressure of conditionalities by reproducing the already existing gendered dynamics at home (de la Rocha, 2003; 2004) and in the labour market (formal and informal economy), which entails relying on social networks (de la Rocha, 2008b; Paz and de la Rocha, 2007) and norms within social territories (Lomnitz, 1977). Furthermore, this has directly modified the strategies to navigate poverty (de la Rocha, 2004; Lomnitz 1977; Lomnitz and Sheinbaum, 2011) that beneficiaries of *Prospera* deployed as it was the case with rushing from their children’s school to the workshops and back to pick up their children; borrowing money to cover “voluntary fees” and pay someone to cover them in the “voluntary faenas”; requesting spokesperson to wait them to pay the “voluntary donations” until they had enough money; remaining on a part time informal job to keep their benefits given that a full time employment on a minimum wage (formal economy) or below the minimum (informal economy) would not compensate the loses; or unsubscribing fathers from the household’s benefits that the following section investigates.

Asuncion explained some of the tensions experienced between beneficiaries of *Prospera* and non-beneficiaries due to “faenas”:

*Asuncion*     *And everyone who has Prospera here has to clean the streets. But now people are saying that they are not going to do any cleaning, because the people from Prospera have to do it.*

*Gerardo*     *Who is saying that?*

*Asuncion*   *Those who don't have Prospera*

*Gerardo*     *So, what are people without Prospera really saying?*

*Asuncion*   *Yeah, because they leave all the cleaning to those who have Prospera. They say, 'That is why they are paying them,' they tell us. 'That's why the government is paying them, so they do the cleaning of the streets...'*

*Gerardo*     *And what do you think about that?*

*Asuncion*   *That they are wrong. Because we are supposed to keep the streets clean, but not only people with Prospera, but everyone!*

*beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Asuncion reflect a common concern among all beneficiaries interviewed in both rural areas, that non-beneficiaries perceived them as some sort of “government employee” with the responsibility for keeping the communities clean and tidy. Non-beneficiaries of *Prospera* spoke directly about this. Mar put it clearly:

*"Well beneficiaries from Prospera should go out to the streets and sweep them, because they are being paid whilst we are not..." Mar, non-beneficiary, rural area*

As Mar illustrates, non-beneficiaries perceived the support from *Prospera* as a sort of payment to its beneficiaries. Furthermore, they considered that because they were not receiving such support, that allowed them to request beneficiaries to perform those activities. Accordingly, Eliza explained why she considered that people from *Prospera* should do those activities:

*"I mean, I would have wanted to get Prospera, because even though it is not a lot of money, the little you get is useful... And there is a lot of people in here that have it, but they [Prospera] just don't look at me, they don't consider my situation... And it is not that we don't help [with 'faenas']. It's just that they are receiving the programme*

*and we are not... they are being paid and we are not; so they should clean..."* Eliza, non-beneficiary, rural area

The words of Eliza might reflect some resentment for not having received government support despite clearly needing it. It is as if she was taking it out on beneficiaries and thus left the responsibility for keeping the community clean to them. The words of Mar and Eliza reflect a common belief among non-beneficiaries: *Prospera's* support functions as a form of payment for beneficiaries to keep the community in good conditions. Similarly, Blanca explained why she perceived that as something positive:

*"So there is the 'faenas', where those from Prospera come and clean... I think it's right that they do it; I mean they should! It is their task right? That's one of the reasons why they are getting their benefits; but we are not..."* Blanca, non-beneficiary, rural area

The words of Blanca also put forward the perceived obligation of beneficiaries from *Prospera* to maintain the community in good condition. This generated a feeling of unfairness and a climate of distrust between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. As such, "*faenas*" fulfil the purpose of "*subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals*" (McNay, 2000: 99) wherein the lack of a local public waste collection budget is misrecognised in the form of community service, thus rendering beneficiaries accountable to the community for public cleaning. However, beneficiaries perceived this as unjust. Jenny explained her opinion of the alleged obligation of beneficiaries to look after the community:

*"I mean, they [Prospera] are not paying us, they just give us some support, because it ain't a payment; I mean how much money do we have left of what they give us, really?... I think that's wrong, because if there was solidarity, everything would be better..."* Jenny, beneficiary, rural area

The lack of solidarity Jenny refers to might be a manifestation of a growing process of disenchantment with rural residence and a residue of growing internal and external migration from rural areas to bigger towns and cities. Nevertheless, the remaining bonding and cohesion present in rural areas is certainly not improved by a system of community actions that rest on conditioning money upon them. Whether or not benefits of *Prospera* are conditioned upon “*faenas*” is not the point. In fact, all other beneficiaries, except for two, in rural areas felt they had to comply with them or risk having a reduction in their benefits.

The recollections of interviewees highlight the compartmentalisation of human actions and interactions promoted by CCT. In both urban and rural areas, the rationale and functioning of conditionalities drove the enactment of “*deservingness*” via “*othering*” onto other people in poverty. The internalisation of self-reliance advanced by *Prospera* that chapter six discussed, reaffirmed social scrutiny from beneficiaries to other people in poverty and alienated them from non-beneficiaries of *Prospera*. However, the functioning of *Prospera* in tight-knit communities promoted a confrontation between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. There, the perception of welfare support in the community rendered beneficiaries responsible for a public service the local government has stopped providing. In turn, this increased frustration, lack of trust and ultimately confrontation. The result of this was a growing “*finger-pointing*” about whose responsibility it was to take care of the community, which weakened social cohesion and as such left a reduced capacity within those communities to organise for the common good.

### *7.2.3. Household relationships*

*Based on the findings of this research, Prospera* also altered social dynamics at a household level. Dany exemplified this when she referred to an occasion in which staff of a health clinic confronted her because her husband could not attend the medical check-up:

*"...The major problem, is that the "Mr" [her husband] can almost never make it. Because all household members have to go to the health clinic appointment, but if the man doesn't go, in the health clinic they tell us, 'It would have been better for you not to come, because if one [family member] is not coming, you get a deduction anyways'...And you know when he can't make it, that is just more problems you know?" Dany, beneficiary, urban area*

The case of Dany illustrates not only the mismatch between *Prospera* and her needs, but also the tensions in her household for trying to navigate those needs and conditionalities. As noted in chapter five, the logic of earning government support that is behind welfare surveillance clashes with beneficiaries' living conditions. The case of Dany emphasises a common problem among beneficiaries: finding their benefits reduced when husbands could not miss work to meet conditionalities. Some beneficiaries have opted to take fathers' names out of *Prospera's* list of households to stop that from happening. This in turn has altered household dynamics often at the expense of their basic needs. Monica explained:

*Monica All family members that are in the programme have to go to the family health checks at least once a year. My husband is not on the list because he just didn't want to go to the doctor's appointments, and if you miss them you get the deduction. So, he doesn't have it, only me and my girl who is at secondary school.*

*Gerardo When you were first registered on the programme [Prospera], was your husband also registered?*

*Monica Yeah, but then I unsubscribed him because he was not going to the doctor's appointments and it is there when you get the deductions...*

*beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Monica illustrate a strategy undertaken by some interviewees: unsubscribing men from their family cluster to prevent a deduction in their bimonthly stipend. The national director of evaluation of *Prospera* on an interview stated:

*“We are aware that female beneficiaries take the names of the fathers out of the household list to avoid deductions on their benefits. But we can’t inform every household that this is a possibility, otherwise we would see a drop out of fathers from Prospera...”*

It might be argued that the capacity to decide whom to include or remove from the list of their household allegedly empowers women by giving them full control of their programme and ultimately their benefits. As chapter five and six have demonstrated, the structure in which *Prospera* rests almost exclusively on the head of a household - which in most cases is a woman - clashes with their needs. Accordingly, fathers that are no longer part of the beneficiaries’ list find it more difficult to access free and appropriate health care. Furthermore, given that complying with *Prospera* entails watching over the household’s health, nutrition and children’s education, the functioning of *Prospera* detaches male involvement when it comes to household responsibilities. Alberto put it clearly:

*“Well, the money from the programme [Prospera] is hers really, ’cause she is the one who goes here and there... She has to be on time to the meetings, sometimes doing some voluntary work like cleaning or sweeping... She is the one that cashes the benefits, and with that money she can get some stuff...” Alberto, beneficiary household, rural area*

The words of Alberto emphasise how he perceived *Prospera* as his wife’s responsibility. As analysed in chapter six, this reproduces social roles in the community and in the household that are suitable for the functioning of *Prospera* and the vulnerability of beneficiaries to capitalist exploitation. For beneficiary women the fact

that *Prospera* gives the benefits to them as opposed to their husbands is simply a reflection of how they care for their household. In words of Ruth:

*Gerardo So how do you divide the responsibilities at home?*

*Ruth Well my responsibilities are to take care and look after them, my children and my husband. And his responsibilities are, well, to work and bring money home...*

*beneficiary, urban area*

Ruth's words mirror the logic of *Prospera* of giving the benefits to the member of the household that allegedly cares the most about the household's needs: women. Similarly, Angy explained the difference between how women used money compared with men:

*"Well we get the money [from Prospera] because they say we know how to distribute it better for our children. Us women use the programme for the benefit of our children. We are not going to drink it away as a man would..." Angy, beneficiary, rural area*

Certainly, after all these years of receiving their benefits, households have normalised women receiving the cash transfers. For instance, Vegonia also mentioned that *Prospera* gives them the money because they are more responsible:

*"Yeah, it's women who receive the programme, because we are more responsible, because we know better how to make ends meet. Basically we use money better..." Vegonia, beneficiary, urban area*

The words of Ruth, Angy and Vegonia are a reflection of the burden of *Prospera* on one of the two parents. It has been argued that the power that comes from deciding how to allocate their benefits grants women financial independence vis-à-vis their role



in a couple (Behrman and Skoufias, 2006). Notwithstanding, those benefits were barely sufficient to cover some subsistence needs. Accordingly, Naty explained the extent to which she had financial independence:

*“As a housewife, where am I going to get money from to give to my children? You have to be there getting money from your husband really...” Naty, beneficiary, urban area*

Naty’s benefits were not enough and, as all other interviewees, she depended on the income from another household member. Furthermore, drawing from the discussion in chapter five, conditionalities from *Prospera* pushed beneficiaries into a “low wage work-household work” cycle that underscores the limited financial independence of beneficiaries. The words of Jacky exemplified how despite her benefits and income, her household depended economically on her husband’s wage:

*“Well I have to administer what I get from my programme [Prospera] and my little wage; so if my husband gives me \$500 [£20] this week, then I can get the groceries for this week...” Jacky, beneficiary, rural area*

The words of Naty and Jacky emphasise the little financial independence they had. Furthermore, they underscore the reproduction of social dynamics in the community and the household that *Prospera* advances. The cash transfers from *Prospera* provided them with some economic relief. Notwithstanding, conditional money reduced people’s control over their resources, as chapter five investigated. Furthermore, the reproduction of social dynamics pushed by *Prospera* harmed the self of beneficiaries, as evidenced in chapter six. Finally, the functioning of *Prospera* further detached fathers from household responsibilities and affected their access to better health and nutrition.

#### 7.2.4 Relevance to alienation

*Prospera* reconfigured social dynamics. The confrontation among its beneficiaries revealed the asymmetries of power *Prospera* nurtured. Accordingly, the formal and symbolic power with which spokespeople are vested, may be understood in terms of empowerment and ultimately a positive aspect of *Prospera* that allegedly breaks with the historical lack of power women wield in society (Gonzalez, 2003). Notwithstanding, the instances of interaction that *Prospera* promotes draw from the internalisation of self-reliance, resilience and adaptation that are functional for the logic of “*deservingness*”. The enactment of such logic among beneficiaries confronted them and increased shame and disrespect, thus hindering social cohesion.

Interactions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries reflected the training from *Prospera* regarding “*othering*” and the use of the stigmatising discourse of holding people responsible for remaining in poverty. Accordingly, people in receipt of *Prospera*, while recognising structural constraints people in poverty face, blamed poverty on their neighbour’s disvalues or behaviours. Moreover, the “*voluntary*” community actions have rendered beneficiaries responsible for keeping the localities clean, which has reduced non-beneficiaries’ involvement taking care of their localities, confronting them with each other, and leaving behind a less cohesive society.

At household level, the reproduction of traditional values coupled with the inflexibility of conditionalities, increased households’ unequal distribution of chores. Beneficiaries normalised the fact that the programme belongs to heads of household (women in the majority of cases), which reduced fathers’ engagement at home and hindered their chances of accessing health care.

Interviewees felt trapped in a complex network of service providers, promoters and government officials that was hard to navigate, let alone to contest. In this interaction of unequal shares of power (formal and symbolic) rests a latent confrontation that reduces the “*collective-being*” of communities that leaves the already worse off powerless. All in all, the material and symbolic construing of poverty is the

backdrop against which people in poverty have been approached, treated and measured, which alienates the “*social-being*” and which people internalised in the form of humiliation, isolation, disrespect, shame and lack of voice.

### **7.3. Chapter summary**

Social interaction and community support were hindered due to a social programme that rests on conditioning welfare support according to certain behaviours, attitudes and aspirations. This section summarises the forms in which alienation from others took place. It starts by reasserting the key arguments and claims posited in this chapter. It then discusses the core evidence and concludes with the implications for alienation.

#### *7.3.1. Key arguments and claims*

Overall, this chapter argued that *Prospera* alienates the “*social-being*”. It advanced the argument that alienation from the self is the platform from which alienation from others builds. It also argued that the misrecognition, condescension and complicity of CCT allowed symbolic violence to operate in both urban and rural areas, which reduced the collective agency of welfare recipients. Moreover, it claimed that the “*success-failure*” narrative increased *Prospera*’s authority and reinforced the logic of “*deservingness*”. Finally, it claimed that *Prospera* trained beneficiaries to enact shaming and “*deservingness*”, which was functional for the operation and continuation of CCT without contestation.

#### *7.3.2. Core evidence*

The first section showed the forms in which *Prospera* distributed shares in power to gain compliance and avoid defiance. Accordingly, spokespeople gained formal and symbolic power for denouncing non-compliance. The concomitant misrecognition of dynamics of power eased by conditional money rendered people responsible for poverty, which permitted *Prospera* to advance a type of “*welfarised agency*” through the logic of “*deservingness*”. Furthermore, it showed that because of the unequal power

relations that CCT creates, people felt disrespect, humiliation and discrimination. This in turn reinforced the logic of “*deservingness*” wherein material living standards became the measure of success. In fact, *Prospera* used cash transfers to push its beneficiaries to internalise and use such logic onto other people in poverty.

The second section showed how *Prospera* used institutional shaming to indoctrinate its beneficiaries to shame non-compliant beneficiaries and ultimately others in poverty. It demonstrated that the internalisation of self-reliance coupled with the logic of “*deservingness*” by its welfare recipients normalised shaming as a form of social interaction. This promoted “*othering*” and stigmatising discourses that drove confrontation, which people experienced in the form of suspicion, distrust and fear. Furthermore, it showed how *Prospera* rewarded with institutional recognition and more formal and symbolic power those beneficiaries that located “*the other*”, the non-compliant, “*scrounger*” beneficiary. In turn, this created distrust among beneficiaries.

It also showed the specific ways in which *Prospera* affected social relations. It demonstrated that the interactions between beneficiaries changed because of *Prospera*'s unequal shares in power that increased confrontation, reduced social bonding and pushed beneficiaries that were struggling the most further away from society. The indoctrination of *Prospera* and its concomitant “*othering*”, shaming and logic of “*deservingness*” broke trust and increased fear among beneficiaries. Furthermore, it showed how people rendered others in poverty responsible for remaining there, thus reproducing the self-reliance logic of *Prospera*. CCT promoted a tense interaction between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in rural areas, particularly when it came to taking care of their community. At the family level, it reproduced household inequalities, pushed fathers further away from household chores and might have reduced their chances for accessing free and good health care.

This chapter demonstrated how *Prospera* exacerbated the disruption of social cohesion and bonding in society, which research participants experienced in the form

of powerlessness, humiliation, disrespect, shame, stigma, distrust, fear, suspicion and isolation.

### 7.3.3. Alienation

The motion of alienation from others takes place via the material and symbolic construing of poverty and its concomitant internalisation in the form of isolation, disrespect, humiliation and lack of voice. Accordingly, these dynamics pushed people further away from their communal links which disrupted collectivity and hindered their participation in society in fulfilling and meaningful ways.

The alienation from others experienced in poverty lies in the interaction of the material conditions with how these are construed socially. The “*deservingness*” discourse and its enactment through “*othering*”, shaming and stigmatising effectively alienates people in poverty from other members of society in their day-to-day interactions. Thus, alienation from others rests on the unequal power relations and disrespectful treatment largely due to appearance, limited resources and power imbalances. In particular, the alienation from others that interviewees suffered took place because of a welfare system that trains them to be resilient and self-reliant while at the same time requiring them to prove themselves worthy of support. That is to say, alienation from others builds from alienation from oneself.

As expressed by interviewees, when people in poverty are treated with disrespect, when they were not acknowledged or when they were denied a particular service because of their living conditions, their sense of worth was severely diminished and this ultimately pushed them further away from participating in activities they would have otherwise liked to participate in. This has been exacerbated by the *neoliberalisation* process in Mexico that has pushed for a framing of poverty based on household and individual performance vis-à-vis the social security system, as is the case with *Prospera*.

On the one hand, framing poverty in terms of personal responsibility perpetuates the idea of people in poverty “*volunteering to be poor*” (Williams et al., 1999). On the other, it normalises talking about and to people in poverty with disrespect and at best with indifference, which is the internalisation of the institutional indifference that manifests through daily interactions among people in poverty. However, *Prospera* takes it a step further. In an attempt to maximise compliance, it promotes beneficiaries to enact shame, symbolic violence, “*othering*” and the “*deservingness*” rationale upon other beneficiaries, which alienates them from their “*social-being*”.

The material and symbolic differences in the urban-rural divide entail that people in worse off conditions have fundamental lacks of power. In that sense, people in rural areas have comparatively less power than people in urban areas. Those lacks are visible not only in terms of lack of voice and reduced access to real and symbolic power but also in terms of household, community and societal dynamics. The neoliberal welfare system that is CCT rests on and often strengthens those disparities. This is the case because the shares in power it provides in exchange for compliance promote inequalities. These in turn not only generate abuses of power (Hevia, 2009), but they also promote confrontations that reduce the voice and “*social-agency*” to organise and fight a system of social control such as CCT. Thus, the rationale of compliance and surveillance attached to CCT legitimates the unequal structures of power.

The result of this is a fractured society prone to stigma, humiliation, shame, symbolic violence, and “*othering*” that effectively separates the social-being from communities and leaves behind an increasingly isolated society that struggles to navigate unsatisfied needs. These are the lasting effects of alienation produced through a welfare system that rests on a “*deservingness*” logic that scrutinises performance, punishes deviance and silences defiance. Thereby, from the vantage point of the social security system, needs are the component that have permitted and justified the intervention of CCT. Nevertheless, from the vantage point of social interaction,

conditionalities that provide some cash to navigate some subsistence needs have increased alienation from others.

## Chapter VIII: Conclusion

By developing a theory of alienation this thesis has sought to explain the relation between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty and its impact in society. To that end it focused on the CCT programme *Prospera* and the experiences of people in poverty. This chapter starts by summarising the results and directly answering the research questions (restated below). It then provides a final defence to the theory of alienation in poverty. It concludes with a discussion about the policy implications of this doctoral thesis.

***The central research question driving this research: How does the concept of alienation reframe the relation between neoliberalism, social policy and poverty and its impact in Mexican society?***

*The following four are subdivisions of the central research question:*

- I. To what extent can Prospera be viewed as an archetype of neoliberal policy?*
- II. In what ways does Prospera hinder the satisfaction of needs for its recipients in terms of their resources and opportunities?*
- III. In what ways does Prospera impact the “self” of its beneficiaries in terms of self-worth, self-esteem and power over their living conditions?*
- IV. To what extent does Prospera promote internal division among its beneficiaries and within the broader society?*

### **8.1. Prospera and the alienation of people in poverty**

**Answer to research question I:** Through a historical review of the evolution of social policy in Mexico, it was possible to characterise *Prospera* as a form of neoliberal welfare policy. Chapter two provided evidence of the links between the neoliberal paradigm and *Prospera*. By positioning CCT as the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico, it showed how its roots linked with the ethos of neoliberal rationale. More specifically, it



traced the relation between the logic of conditioning money and the need by capitalist neoliberalism to orientate people to the dynamics of the market.

At first (1997), CCT aimed to support people in rural area via cash transfers conditional upon behaviours around health, nutrition and education. The result was the establishment of a new type of social provision, which advocated for an activation logic of welfare recipients. This new social provision aimed to break with the intergenerational transmission of poverty via human capital formation. The confluence of behavioural economics and the international support from financial institutions entailed the rolling out of CCT as a flagship of poverty alleviation in Mexico.

After 2000, the government extended CCT to urban areas in an attempt to reduce poverty. The growing influence of CCT worldwide coupled with the findings from evaluations supporting this form of welfare provision, granted it a continuous and growing allocation of resources. The result was national and international support for CCT, which also increased its legitimacy. By continuing to roll out CCT across the country, the government aimed to consolidate the logic of “*quid pro quo*” in welfare provision that is functional for the reproduction of capitalism as it influences people to be resilient and adapt to labour and market dynamics.

After 2012, with the change of name to *Prospera*, the government envisioned to further CCT, strengthen its links with other social programmes and continue the logic of conditional support. The growing budget that it received, and the constant evaluations, did not however result in the reduction of poverty (CONEVAL, 2016). The making of the biggest - in terms of budget - and largest - in terms of population supported - social programme in Mexico reflects the embeddedness of the neoliberal paradigm in welfare provision. The state-citizenship relationship changed from one based on supporting people according to needs to one based on people proving their worth to get government support. Accordingly, conditional money aims to shape people’s behaviours and mindsets to this new logic.

Conditioning government support based on people's completion of very specific actions related to health, nutrition and education responds to a narrow definition of poverty. This definition draws on a logic of attributing to single individuals the capacity of restoring social inequalities by participating in the labour market; through hard work and effort people will allegedly increase their income and as such escape poverty. This rationale of exiting poverty through resilience, self-reliance and adaptation hinders the understanding of poverty while at the same time it is functional to market dynamics (Chandler, 2018). Appealing to these characteristics as the “*exit-doors*” of poverty reduces the complexities of people to mere welfare recipients. This rather linear approach to poverty alleviation mirrors the neoliberal paradigm inasmuch as it fulfils the purpose of making people accountable for their own living conditions.

**Answer to research question II:** Arguably, *Prospera* achieved an improvement in people's living conditions and reduced the harms of poverty (Prospera, 2017; SEDESOL, 2015). However, the analysis in chapter 5 provided evidence that CCT stands in opposition to its beneficiaries' material living conditions and ultimately their needs.

Chapter five argued that *Prospera* alienates people from their resources and opportunities. It showed that the institutional shame that *Prospera* used (through publicly identifying non-compliant beneficiaries) to ascertain compliance reduced beneficiaries' control over their resources. This was the case because people paid “*voluntary*” donations, stopped working and as such stopped earning income and used their “*free*” time to comply with conditionalities. In an attempt to avoid the shame of non-compliance, beneficiaries allocated their very limited resources as per *Prospera* requirements, which often affected the satisfaction of household needs. This was particularly acute for people in worse-off economic conditions, which had the effect of increasing inequalities. That is to say, the way *Prospera* uses shame as a tool of control alienates people from their resources and opportunities.

Chapter five also showed the institutional indifference of *Prospera* regarding its beneficiaries' needs. People in both urban and rural areas struggled to navigate

conditionalities and ended up caught in an intricate system of welfare provision that was at odds with their living conditions. *Prospera* not only failed to recognise personal and household needs but also measured their value in terms of performance. This was evidenced by the harms of the “one-size-fits-all” approach to poverty alleviation that disregards structural differences between urban and rural areas and differences in household configuration. The result of this was that people with less access to resources and infrastructure struggled the most to comply with the conditions attached to their benefits. More specifically, it meant that complying with *Prospera* for people in more social, symbolic and economic disadvantage invested proportionally more (material and immaterial) resources to fit the programme’s requirements. The material hardships of poverty, coupled with a welfare system based on surveillance, meant more powerlessness, uncertainty and insecurity for people in poverty.

The increasing demands of *Prospera* over time, chapter five also demonstrated, increased the anxiety of welfare recipients who struggled to find sufficient time for household chores, building family relations, earning an income and complying with conditionalities. People who lived far away from health clinics and schools and had limited access to transportation struggled the most. In such a way, *Prospera* reproduced the geographical inequalities already existent in the localities.

Another key finding of chapter five was that the unequal operation of *Prospera* from urban to rural areas increased the urban-rural divide and as such contributed to the inequality and the dispossession of people’s resources. Chapter five evidenced the rampant deprivations, power asymmetries, and abuses within a system of geographically located inequalities that constant surveillance from *Prospera* of beneficiaries’ living circumstances and behaviour exacerbates. In this sense, the lived experience of beneficiaries of *Prospera* puts forward the inadequacy of CCT to alleviate their needs and in fact illuminates the burdens that it poses to their time, their resources and the realisation of agency.

Conditionalities aim to produce a behavioural change on beneficiaries to "re-wire" them and make them productive in the labour market, which will ultimately and allegedly produce social change (SEDESOL, 2012). Chapter five showed that in reality, that has meant "re-wiring" people to enter a low wage cycle that impedes self-actualisation let alone accessing fulfilling jobs.

**Answer to research question III:** The goal of CCT is to make sure people achieve their potential by shaping people's behaviours. Accordingly, *Prospera* puts self-reliance, resilience and personal skills at the forefront while advancing adaptability and hard work as essential to increase income and exit poverty. The ethos behind welfare conditionality derives from a free market rationale, directly linking and largely explaining poverty through behaviour, putting individual decision making as the cornerstone of development (WB, 2015). Chapter six showed how *Prospera* trains beneficiaries to be self-reliant and accountable for their actions, and to develop patterns of behaviour that show they are "good citizens" and "good parents" and thus become "successful individuals" in order to be able to exit poverty. For *Prospera*, the resulting benefits from abiding by the conditions attached to its benefits overcome personal costs related to the time burden of compliance or the emotional token of discounts for non-compliance. However, chapter six showed the limitations and harms of this approach to agency.

Chapter six argued that *Prospera* alienated the self of its beneficiaries. It showed that *Prospera* reproduced an idea of "success" drawn from a logic of living standards and material living conditions that advances a type of agency that mirrors the neoliberal subject (Chandler, 2016) functional for the exploitation of capital. It exhibited the specific forms in which *Prospera* drove this logic onto its beneficiaries via a "reward-punishment" logic that granted compliance despite often clashing with people's needs. All research interviewees at some point had their benefits sanctioned and in the worst case they were withdrawn from the programme. Chapter six showed that the internalisation of that idea of "success" in the form of self-reliance, self-accountability and resilience meant people enacted the logic of "deservingness" onto

themselves. Evidence of this was interviewees' self-blaming for losing their benefits, which increased powerlessness, frustration and shame. Furthermore, reproducing the logic of "*deservingness*" reduced their critical thinking about the functioning of *Prospera* that ultimately isolated them - as shown later in chapter seven.

Interviewees' living conditions worsened, chapter six also demonstrated, because they were penalised on the basis of not demonstrating the type of "*welfarised agency*" required by *Prospera*. As a result, they were left with the stigma and shame attached to beneficiaries removed from the programme, the self-blame for not being able to keep up with their responsibilities towards the programme and a reduction of an income they already relied on. This weakened their capacity to navigate poverty, reduced their self-esteem and perception of self-worth.

**Answer to research question IV:** Arguably, the functioning of *Prospera* improves social interaction, incites participation of beneficiaries in the community and improves social cohesion (Prospera, 2017; Presidencia, 2012; 2018). However, chapter seven showed the reconfiguration of social dynamics and concomitant injuries created by *Prospera*.

Chapter seven argued that *Prospera* alienated its beneficiaries from others. Furthermore, it claimed that alienation from oneself is the platform on which alienation from others draws. It showed that *Prospera* operates through misrecognition, complicity and condescension that works via symbolic violence. When spokespeople denounced non-compliance their symbolic power in relation to other beneficiaries increased and as such their complicity with *Prospera*. However, the misrecognition of local inequalities render invisible the fact that such shares of power spokespeople receive from *Prospera* does not provide them with real power over their lives, as chapter five evidenced. Instead, *Prospera* provides them with power to surveil and scrutinise beneficiaries while maintaining the *status quo*.

Accordingly, the structure of *Prospera*, chapter seven exhibited, rests on attributing shares of power as an incentive for compliance to both public servants and beneficiaries alike, which permits symbolic violence to operate through *Prospera*. Thus, it showed that *Prospera's* complicity, condescension and misrecognition allows symbolic violence to operate in urban and rural areas. This promotes unbalanced interactions characterised by unequal shares of power with a particularly acute effect on people who already have less power. Thus, chapter seven showed that shame is the ultimate tool of conditional money

Chapter seven also showed that *Prospera* advanced the embeddedness of a material and symbolic construing of poverty that is prone to a logic of "*deservingness*". This was evidenced by the forms in which *Prospera* promotes asymmetries of power, distributing formal and informal power to spokespeople. This, together with the institutional recognition to people who denounced non-compliance, promoted disrespect, humiliation and discrimination.

Chapter seven demonstrated the forms in which *Prospera* used institutional shaming. This chapter described how it trained its beneficiaries to use shame in their interaction with other beneficiaries. This evidenced the enactment and normalisation of the logic of "*deservingness*" via shaming as a form of social interaction. The resulting "*othering*" and stigmatising interactions prompted fractured interactions characterised by fear, suspicion and distrust.

This effectively separates beneficiaries from their "*social-being*" by ripping apart the bonding and social relations built amid trust which are constitutive of human needs. This very material form of "*othering*" differs from what has been discussed in the poverty literature in the UK where "*othering*" has been used largely as a discursive tool that has informed the policy debate (Wacquant, 2008) to justify government cuts to welfare provision. In the case of *Prospera*, it is clear what the name and surname of the "*other*" is. As chapter seven showed, *Prospera* requests beneficiaries to put a name, a surname and an address to those that need punishment and to be "*brought back*" to the

system: the non-compliant households. Perversely, *Prospera* pushes beneficiaries to “othering” and shaming in order to “help” neighbours to get back on track to exiting poverty. That is to say, *Prospera* actively creates the mechanism for finding the “other” and embeds in its recipients the logic to enforce the rules and the “deservingness” rationale. The result of this is a collection of individuals that are pitched against each other, now trained in resilience and self-reliance and now expected to strive and prove worthy of government support, thus mirroring a neoliberal sort of social agency (Chandler, 2016).

**Answer to central research question:** The evidence that this research provides indicates that the theory of alienation illuminates the specific forms in which neoliberalism has embedded in the implementation of social policy in Mexico and the hidden injuries in society from a welfare system emanated from the neoliberal paradigm. The ethos of ethics embodied in CCT reduced people’s control over their living conditions (Chapter five); the self-reliance and resilience that CCT advance, hindered the satisfaction of needs and as such the realisation of critical agency (Chapter six); and the specific social dynamics that CCT nurtured, promoted isolation and disrupted social cohesion (Chapter seven).

**Final considerations about *Prospera*:** The voices of interviewees signal the worst effects of a “one-size-fits-all” approach to poverty alleviation blind to the material circumstances and symbolic embodiments of poverty. Theirs are the voices of people having to rely on subsistence strategies, having to deploy extra efforts to meet household needs and to make sacrifices for their loved ones in an attempt to survive.

The voices of people in poverty underscore how this type of welfare provision enacts shame on the worse off precisely because of their living conditions. It does so for not taking enough time off their informal, unstable and low-wage works to attend workshops and talks, for not spending extra hours of their already convoluted schedule to attend workshops and talks and for not being able to afford transportation and food costs required to claim their benefits back taken away precisely for non-compliance. In

this sense, *Prospera* reproduces and in fact exacerbates inequalities and places an extra burden on people in exchange for a meagre cash transfer that can barely and not in all cases cover some subsistence needs. That burden, heavily felt in terms of reduced control over their time, reproduces a logic that holds people responsible for social phenomena. This logic puts forward a type of agency functional to the dynamics of capital that is at odds with people's satisfaction of needs and realisation of individual agency socially.

The functioning, design and implementation of *Prospera* contributes to trapping in poverty those people struggling the most to survive. CCT insists that conditional government support is paramount to convince parents about the trade-offs between sending children to school or to work and taking household members to health checks instead of self-medicating. When beneficiaries invest their money in their children's education, household health or nutrition, *Prospera* gives itself credit. However, beneficiaries using cash from the programme to support their household's needs speaks of people's strategies to navigate poverty rather than of how efficient conditionalities are. The above is substantiated by the variety of strategies deployed by people in poverty as showed in the literature (de la Rocha, 2006; 2006a; 2008; Hevia, 2009; Mckenzie, 2015; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Tyler, 2013; Vega-Briones, 2011), which are not unique to beneficiaries of *Prospera*. Thus, arguing causation as the government has (SEDESOL, 2014), between conditionalities and people using cash transfers for their households' needs as confirmation of the programme's success is at the least misleading.

The approach to poverty alleviation by the type of social policy reflected in *Prospera* is harmful. The evidence put forward in this doctoral thesis shows that CCT's underlying assumptions reproduce inequality by advancing a "*deservingness*" rationale aligned with capitalist neoliberalism that stands in opposition to people's needs. *Prospera* reflects capitalist exploitation inasmuch as it reproduces self-reliance and adaptation functional to the labour market but in contradiction with people's lived experiences of poverty. It traps the worse off in poverty insofar as growing



conditionalities that mirror the circulation of capital in the production, distribution and consumption process stand in opposition to the living conditions of its beneficiaries.

The welfare provision in Mexico via conditional money clearly exemplifies the underlying neoliberal rationale that pervades a global trend of social policy. The lived experiences of people in poverty lay bare the inflictions and harms of this form of welfare. CCT programmes have become a leading policy strategy of poverty alleviation nonetheless and the wave of reports and evaluations fulfil the purpose of advancing them still further. Hence the relevance of putting forward a useful analytical framework to unpack the intricacies of capital on the day to day lives of people in poverty that is the theory of alienation in poverty.

## **8.2. A final defence of the theory of alienation**

This thesis brings forward the contradictions of capitalism within a particular type of CCT that is *Prospera*. It does so through the voices and experiences of people in poverty in urban and rural Mexico. This decision was coherent with the variations of capital-neoliberalism and the space-time considerations (Jessop, 2014; Peck, 2010a). That is, the focus on urban and rural Mexico was consistent with the goals, scope and purposes of this research. Similarly, the use of dialectics as a method of inquiry and a method of exposition has allowed the development of a theory of alienation in poverty building on a critical appraisal of poverty, needs and agency. In this sense, the philosophy of internal relations and the process of abstraction permitted the analysis of the contradictions of capital in the form of capitalist neoliberalism from the vantage point of social policy. In particular, the investigation of the dynamics of capital in its representations production, distribution and consumption advanced the understanding of the lived experiences of poverty in their interaction with welfare provision and conditional programmes.

This thesis builds mostly on a revision of literature from a wide variety of fields spanning from critical realism, Marxism, alienation, poverty, needs, agency to more

specific ones related to CCT, welfare provision, social policy and in particular evaluations, books and articles about the Mexican CCT programme *Prospera*. In the elaboration of this research, the experiences of research participants were always at the core. This was the case before data collection when elaborating the theoretical framework and developing the research instruments and later in the analysis of findings where their voices heavily informed and in fact positively reconfigured the content of the theory and structure of this thesis and subsequent exposition of results.

This thesis presents novel research on the issue of poverty. It is to the knowledge of the author the first research to operationalise a theory of alienation through the lived experiences of people in poverty. It is innovative inasmuch as it analyses the contradictions of capital manifested in social policy via the voices of welfare recipients. It is also innovative because while it resonates with nascent research critical of the theoretical underpinnings of CCT (Cookson, 2018), for the first time it does so by tracing them to a capitalist neoliberalism.

This thesis draws from the approach to dialectics developed by Friedrich Hegel (Hegel, 1975), amended by Karl Marx (Marx, 1904; 1959), contextualised by David Harvey (Harvey, 2014) and clarified by Bertell Ollman (Ollman, 2003). Dialectics permit the analysis of internal relations and contradictions of social dynamics that Marx considered essential in order to counter mainstream approaches of defining complex processes from cause and effect reductionist methods that still echo to our time. Thus, Marx's dialectical method arose as an advantageous and necessary tool for understanding the contradictions of welfare provision through the lived experiences of poverty.

To that end, this thesis departed from previous notions of alienation (Boltvinik, 1995; 2005b; Gangas, 2014; McClung, 1972) that rested on an earlier humanistic version developed by Marx (Marx, 1970). Thus, it expanded the theoretical grounds of alienation vis-à-vis capital (Fuchs, 2018; Hardt and Negri, 2018; Harvey, 2018; Yibing;

2011) that Marx advanced in the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1971) and to a lesser extent in *Capital Volume I* (Marx, 1990) by applying it to a life in poverty.

The theory of alienation in poverty transcends the current wave of researching welfare from a citizenship approach (Dwyer et al., 2019; Fletcher and Flint, 2018; Fletcher and Wright, 2017; Watts et al., 2018) that draws largely from a human rights perspective. Building on needs as opposed to legal rights provides a more robust and less constrained understanding of society inasmuch as the socio-historical content of needs is not limited to the legal content of citizenship. Furthermore, it allows us to account for the dynamics behind processes of deprivation that the citizenship perspective fails to recognise. Additionally, while the citizenship and human rights approach emphasises access to resources it falls short of recognising the importance of needs to weigh quality of provision, their relationship with market dynamics and their implication for the socialisation of poverty.

Furthermore, as opposed to constructivist and post-constructivist approaches that have largely defined the material world from the vantage point of a social construction, the theory of alienation applied to poverty entails reinterpreting personal experiences vis-à-vis the constraints of the structural forces that contour access to resources and opportunities. The implications for poverty analysis are that it underlines the importance of weighing the realisation of agency in relation to shares of power in society; the satisfaction of needs in relation to the circulation of capital; and the relational/symbolic experience of poverty vis-à-vis its material hardships.

The theory of alienation in poverty puts in motion the material hardships that form the core of poverty with the symbolic embodiments of a life in poverty. Thus, this thesis takes the concept of the poverty wheel sketched by Ruth Lister (Lister, 2004) and develops it through the lens of critical realism. It puts the poverty wheel in motion by explicitly defining the mechanisms through which the core connects with the rim. It explains the specific forms in which the material deprivations of poverty connect with the symbolic experiences. To that end, it develops the three levels of alienation that

reflect a life in poverty: alienation from resources and opportunities, alienation from oneself and alienation from others.

The main feature of the theory of alienation in poverty is that it traces the material hardships from the circulation of capital to explain the symbolic experience of poverty. That permits to account for the contradictions between hard work, sacrifice and effort with the production, distribution and consumption processes. Satisfaction of needs and realisation of agency take centre stage to explain the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. This is a key step that bridges the analysis and explains the functioning of the structural forces and the personal experiences of poverty hitherto disjointed.

The theory of alienation in poverty could benefit from a longitudinal research. For instance, investigating the experiences of welfare support over a 5 year period could illuminate the long term injuries of poverty and as such provide deeper evidence about the specific forms in which the accumulation of disadvantages passes from generation to generation and the consequences of this on how people navigate and experience poverty. Furthermore, developing a next step of the theory of alienation could entail elaborating a matrix of layers per each form of alienation and then develop a mixed method research to triangulate results and extend the scope of the theory.

A future avenue for research could entail a comparative analysis between Mexico and England regarding welfare provision. For instance, analysing how conditional support to homeless people in Birmingham mirrors the lived experience of conditional support in Mexico City and the extent to which welfare provision in Western countries has come to represent one of the varied forms of capitalist exploitation. This would substantiate the mechanisms of alienation and the similarities and differences of how people embody the material hardships of poverty via welfare provision as per space-time variations of capitalist neoliberalism.

Furthermore, the findings of this research highlight the universality of the experience of alienation in poverty, which echoes Walker's research about the

universality of the shame of poverty (Walker, 2014). This substantiates the need for further research about the experience of poverty but from the vantage point of a variety of identities and demographics. For instance, analysing the experience of poverty by migrants from Central America moving to Mexico, or Mexicans living in the United States could illuminate the specific forms in which the three layers of alienation are present in the dynamics of racism subsumed within capitalism.

Additionally, analysing the experiences of children living in the deprived areas of, for instance, Blackpool in Lancashire and Coventry in the West Midlands compared to two rural areas - such as the ones analysed in this thesis - could elucidate how the three layers of alienation relate to household inner dynamics and its deleterious impact on people with less social and political power. Similarly, the theory of alienation posited in this thesis would permit the analysis of how discrimination experienced by people with disability intersects with the three layers of alienation in poverty. Thus, the theory of alienation in poverty opens scope for investigating how these relate to space-time variations of the variegated neoliberalism in its relationship with specific identities. This would in turn enhance the strength of the model that this thesis developed whilst at the same time offering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in the experience of poverty as per differing demographics and identities.

The development of CCT in Latin America heavily influenced by financial institutions has had a lasting impact in the types and forms of welfare provision globally. Drawing from liberal and neo-classical economics with a clear influence from psychology and rational choice theory, the conditionalities envisioned by designers and policy makers of CCT definitely altered state-society interaction. In this, social policy passed from one based on needs to one based on proving yourself worthy of support.

While welfare provision is supposed to alleviate some of the burdens of society, conditionalities rest on holding people accountable for those very same burdens. However, that contradiction has taken a particular turn under neoliberalism, wherein both welfare and conditionalities co-exist and in fact reproduce each other. On the one

hand, conditionalities have remained as a key form of welfare provision because they are economically viable (Skoufias, 2002) and are part of an ethos of resilience and self-reliance surrounding neoliberalism. On the other, a welfare system that holds people accountable for their actions facilitates the functioning of market dynamics and ultimately eases the disposition of its recipients to enter a labour market in need of constant flux of cheap and resilient labour.

The sway of this *"deservingness"* logic in policymaking has increased largely because of its support from international donors. The IMF, WB and IDB have promoted a type of agency wherein individuals take full ownership of their living conditions, which is allegedly paramount for the smooth functioning of the market. To exemplify this, the World Bank on its 2015 World Development Report<sup>79</sup> defined the link between policy and the social-self as follows: *"human sociality implies that behaviour is also influenced by social expectations, social recognition, patterns of cooperation, care of in-group members, and social norms. Indeed, the design of institutions, and the ways in which they organize groups and use material incentives, can suppress or evoke motivation for cooperative tasks, such as community development and school monitoring."* (WB, 2015: 7).

Accordingly, *"Social meanings and social norms, and the social networks that we are a part of, pull us toward certain frames and patterns of collective behaviour."* (Ibid: 9). A clear thread goes from these readings of agency and community all the way down to CCT programmes informing public decision-making. There, the production and reproduction of poverty largely rests on social norms, aspirations and behaviours that are not only inherited<sup>80</sup> but they are also socialised, reinforced and internalised.

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<sup>79</sup> There, the World Bank builds on international experiences, methodologically sound reports, randomised control trials and the notion of *"conditioned cooperators"* (that assumes people will cooperate provided others also cooperate) (WB, 2015), to push for a particular type of social being that is functional for the dynamics of market dynamics.

<sup>80</sup> This is a tradition born after the misreading of David Lewis's infamous work *"The Children of Sanchez"* (Lewis, 1961).

Structural factors are thus externalised and as such can be eventually “fixed” as long as the right incentives and demands are in place.

Practically speaking this paved the way for a wide variety of conditions attached to welfare provision that ranged from school attendance as in the case of “*Keluarga Harapan*” in Indonesia, complying with health related components as in the case of the “*Community Based CCT*” in Tanzania, to attending training to get financial support as in the case of the “*Takaful and Karama*” CCT programme in Egypt, all focused on ending behavioural “deficits” to improve human capital formation. This reflects the ascendance of a type of “welfarised” agency aligned with the needs of market dynamics. These types of practices and social programmes tailored to different groups such as single mothers, homeless, migrants and people in poverty reflect the contradictions of capitalism inasmuch as they serve a twofold purpose.

On the one hand, they have reproduced certain values, expectations and living standards that this thesis encompasses in the concept of a neoliberal ethos. This has been functional to the dynamics of capitalism because it aligns people’s ways of life and efforts with market demands, that is with the production process in the low waged labour and in the consumption of goods and services.

On the other hand, CCT influences welfare recipients to be self-reliant, resilient, participate and adapt to the changes of a globalised economy. In that process, however, people’s control of their living conditions drifts away. Accordingly, their exercise of agency becomes limited to fitting the conditionalities and participating in a low-wage labour market that in turn hinders the realisation of critical agency. Effectively, people are pitched against each other via the key strategy of conditionalities: shame. Thus, this form of social policy that is CCT reproduced worldwide, has been subsumed within and by capitalism and has come to represent one of the multiplicities of capitalist exploitation.

There are several implications of this thesis' findings in relation to welfare provision. First, that conditioning government support based on an individual's display of worth, alienates people. Thus, this thesis questions the validity of providing welfare in terms of citizenship as opposed to needs. Second, that conditionalities sit in opposition to people's needs and living conditions. Therefore, this research shows that conditionalities are a problematic approach to poverty alleviation. Third, that the levels of poverty after twenty years of CCT in Mexico coupled with the harms of CCT, evidence the need to question the permanence of CCT as a form of welfare provision.

All in all, this thesis backs the call to providing a basic income to people in poverty (Sayers, 2011). To that end, as a first step the government of Mexico could start phasing out conditionalities and replacing them by a cash transfer (encompassing the food support, support for school supplies and scholarships of *Prospera*) with no conditions attached. This would allow the follow up of beneficiaries of this support, contrasting the impact with beneficiaries of *Prospera*. Based on the findings of this thesis, beneficiaries of non-conditional support would most likely get the benefits of cash transfers as beneficiaries of *Prospera* do, but without the increased alienation concomitant with CCT. Unconditional cash transfers would considerably reduce the operational costs of *Prospera*. A second step would be to increase the unconditional cash transfer amount and make it a monthly stipend to meet households' day to day expenditures. Part of the cost of this increase could come from the money saved from the operational costs. The other part could come from a more progressive approach to tax such as taxing financial transactions (Baker, 2017) or a wealth tax (Piketty, 2013).

More broadly, the alienation of poverty experienced by research participants of this investigation is a clear manifestation of the need to rethink the fight against poverty and ultimately inequality in Mexico. Restructuring social policy and welfare provision should stand as a central pillar to mitigate the harms of poverty and bring some balance to the distribution of socially available resources. Such restructuring is particularly necessary in three fronts: health, education and work.



In relation to health, efforts to increase access to health care via reforms to the health care system have permitted distribution of public resources to be aligned according to the total number of people registered at a given health care service, as opposed to available clinic infrastructure as was the case in the past. Notwithstanding, unavailability of health care services, particularly of high-speciality treatments in remote locations or deprived areas as well as shortage of medications, increase out-of-pocket expenditure (Gutiérrez et al., 2014), with a damaging effect on people in poverty.

As evidenced in this thesis, it is of the utmost urgency to change the disparities between the private and the public health care sector. No longer can the government afford to maintain an under-resourced health care system as this increases gaps in provision with a particularly deleterious effect on people experiencing poverty. A change of this magnitude will necessarily have to come hand in hand with a fiscal reform that would permit the improvement of public resource distribution across federal States whilst guaranteeing a better exercise of budget by the local authorities (Gómez et al., 2011). This would be a first step to increase service provision and improve quality of health care services in the most deprived areas of the country.

In relation to education, the insufficiency of resources, the disparities between urban and rural schools and *“the low share of 25-34 years-old without an upper secondary education”* (OECD, 2018: 1), have widened the inequality gap. The archaic curriculum in primary and secondary education has not been able to catch up with societal changes and the need for a more inclusive, equal and environmentally aware society. Furthermore, unprecedented technological advancements require a renewed approach to education wherein current and future young generations become not only capable of using but especially directing technology for societal advantages as opposed to economic profits or market-oriented gains.

The lived experience of research participants of this investigation highlights the need to restructure the education system of Mexico to fit the needs of society. The demographic window offered by the proportion of young population in Mexico is being

lost by an insufficient and ill-equipped education policy. Evidence of this is the deplorable conditions of many schools particularly in rural and remote communities, which is preventing teachers and students from maximising the potential of education. A turnaround will entail scaling up infrastructure and service provision in public schools to transit from precariousness to a minimum acceptable quality, particularly in rural and remote communities (OECD, 2018), whilst at the same time reducing the economic burden driven by self-accountability imposed on public institutions. Pairing this with a fiscal reform and a decentralised allocation of resource to schools as per students' and teachers' needs will be fundamental to level the field for higher standards of teaching and infrastructure. This will necessarily have to be accompanied by better support to teachers in terms of teaching materials, working facilities and better and cheaper transportation to schools, as well as constant and improved training as part of their working hours by leading experts and in collaboration with parent-teacher local associations. Free school lunches to students of primary and secondary education and free day-care facilities will promote the learning process of children, and parents' involvement in this process.

In relation to work, reforms in the past years have promoted flexibility of employment in order to increase competitiveness in the global market. This has been particularly the case with the legalisation of outsourcing during the employment reform in 2012 and the growing casual employment contracts in the past years. The result of this has been distinctive relations of production and distribution similar to those of "*the precariat*" described by Guy Standing (2014). This flexibilisation of the labour market has brought the "*work-for-labor relative to labor*" (Standing, 2014: 10) that entails an increasing number of activities without remuneration that are required to apply and prepare for (a number of) jobs while at the same time going without non-wage benefits (pensions, paid holidays, retrenchment benefits), which mirrors the exploitation inside and outside the workplace experienced by research interviewees.

The lived experience of research participants underscores the urgency to rethink social relations of production. In particular, that the approach of pushing local

labour dynamics to fit international prescriptions of neoliberal labour dynamics fails to meet needs particularly of those struggling to make ends meet. Thus, a fundamental first step will be to bring fairness back to labour relations by reforming work and employment dynamics, strengthening regulations of outsourced and casual contracts and supporting the protection of worker rights by unions. Furthermore, it will require adjusting the minimum wage to geographical locations (urban, semi-urban, rural) and demographic variations (indigenous communities) in order to balance historical disparities across society. Similarly, bringing equality in the workplace between men and women will require a labour reform that advances a national commitment, in both private and public sectors, to employ as many women as men, and more stringent policies that penalise discrimination against women and other protected characteristics.

This investigation also substantiates the need to rethink flexibility in the labour market, a flexibility that aligns with the needs of the worker as opposed to the needs of the neoliberal labour market. This will entail facilitating the roll out of home-office-work, reducing the working week to four days and reducing the workday to 6 hours without affecting the working benefits of people. Literature has shown the social and economic returns of such changes (Edmans, 2015) that will most likely occur largely because of the technological revolution already taking place worldwide (Manyika et al., 2017)<sup>81</sup> and the potential environmental relief of fewer commuters and fewer resources deployed to maintain offices. This will, however, need to go hand in hand with additional support to adapt employees' homes to be suitable to work safely, via investment coming from budget saved because of home-office-work. Additional resources to afford these changes will come from a progressive tax reform that eliminates tax avoidance and aims to increase redistribution and reduce inequality<sup>82</sup>. Implementing these changes now will provide enough time to readjust and adapt to the

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<sup>81</sup> According to a report from McKinsey & Company *"Our scenarios suggest that half of today's work activities could be automated by 2055, but this could happen up to 20 years earlier or later depending on various factors, in addition to other economic conditions"* (Manyika et al., 2017: 3)

<sup>82</sup> A clear example of this rampant inequality is that *"the value of the top ten corporations was \$285 tn, beating the \$280tn worth of the bottom 180 countries"*. (Inman, 2016: 2).

shifting dynamics of global capitalism and the effects of global warming that will most likely worsen in the following years.

All in all, drawing from the classical work of Karl Polanyi, what is required is to counter the market rationality that has dis-embedded the economy from society via a dismantling of collective reciprocity (Polanyi, 1957). Thus, the fight against the resulting poverty and inequality should start by re-embedding the economy in society via a coherent and innovative welfare system and processes of redistribution.

Therefore, rather than a mere cosmetic change in the functioning of social policy, this would represent a profound change in welfare provision. In this change, the state-society relationship would be based on supporting people according to needs. Thence, drawing from Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program (Marx, 1970), the enunciation of the entitlement theory for social justice would read: from each according to the realisation of critical agency, to each according to needs.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Drivers behind the fourth wave of social policy

Firstly, unrestrained levels of corruption reduced the efficacy of social programmes. This was one of the main reasons underlying the constant internal and external evaluations of CCT. In other words, the implementation of the fourth wave represented a key step in accountability and transparency that reduced instances of corruption and gave some certainty about expenditure of public money.

Secondly, social programmes in the past stopped every six years with the election of new Executive and Legislative representatives. The fourth wave of social policy achieved continuity by advancing the process of decentralisation of social policy initiated by the third wave. To that end, it established the National Commission of *Progresa* (initial name of the CCT programme in Mexico) and gave state governments the task of identification, revision and incorporation of new households, coordinating provision of benefits with municipal and local authorities and ensuring the effective operation of the programme.

Thirdly, the levels of inequality and poverty during the first half of the 1990s required a different type of social provision detached from the mistakes of its predecessors but capable of learning from some of their success. As with the third wave, it incorporated communities in the execution of the programme, but it did so only in rural areas in the form of voluntary actions to keep the community clean. Like wave two, it put access to jobs and generation of income centre stage, but did so indirectly through workshops and talks aimed at increasing human capital formation. It deployed media to highlight government's actions as done during wave three, but it reinforced messages with results from internal and external evaluations.

Fourthly, the growing relevance of economic thought in policy making together with the influence from the IMF and the WB paved the way for the implementation of a social programme that resonated with key tenets from neo-classical economics. The economic support from financial institutions to the implementation and rolling out of the fourth wave of social policy in Mexico attests to that, as analysed in the last section of this chapter.

## Appendix 2: Main components of *Progresa*

The first component of *Prospera* was a nutritional supplement that supplied 100% of the required micronutrients and 20% of the daily calorie intake for mothers and children below 5 years old. The second was cash support to improve the quantity and the diversity of food and thus improve nutrition of households. The economic support for food was £4.90 (125 Mexican pesos<sup>91</sup>) every two months, adjusted to account for inflation (*Progresa*, 1999). In order to receive this support, families had to attend periodic health care visits and mothers had to attend health education sessions.



Regarding education, the programme provided cash transfers in exchange for school attendance. It gave scholarships through a twice-monthly stipend to every household member below 18 years old enrolled in a school. This scholarship was not to exceed £24.50 (\$625 Mexican pesos) per month per household. The maximum amount of economic support (education and nutrition) per family could not exceed £27.60 (\$750 Mexican pesos), not including economic support for school supplies. This restriction responded to the assumption that a higher amount could “inhibit the commitment of families to overcome their condition of poverty through personal efforts to improve themselves” (Progresa, 1999: 26) It adjusted the scholarships according to life cycles and it gave a relatively higher cash transfer to female students from secondary level (seventh to ninth year) onwards.

**Monthly monetary support by Progresa with monthly and bimonthly totals**

Item	Amounts in Mexican pesos by the end of 1999	Amounts in pounds sterling
<b>Food support</b>	\$125	£4.90
<b>Scholarships primary school</b>		
3rd year	\$80	£3.10
4th year	\$95	£3.70
5th year	\$125	£4.90
6th year	\$165	£6.40
<b>Scholarships secondary school(Junior high school)</b>		
First year		
Male	\$240	£9.40
Female	\$250	£9.80
Second year		
Male	\$250	£9.80
Female	\$280	£10.90
Third year		
Male	\$265	£10.30
Female	\$305	£11.90
<b>Maximum amount per month</b>	<b>\$750</b>	<b>£29.40</b>
<b>Maximum amount bimonthly</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>	<b>£58.80</b>

Source: Progresa, 1999

For children enrolled between third and sixth year of primary school, it gave in kind support or cash to the amount of £4.30 (£110 Mexican pesos) for school supplies at the beginning of every academic year. Additionally,

at the beginning of the second semester, it gave further monetary support of £2.10 (\$55 Mexican pesos) per child for replenishing school supplies. For children below 18 years old enrolled in junior high school, it gave a single monetary support of £8 (\$205 Mexican pesos) for school supplies. The purpose of this scholarship was to retain students in school and provide an economic incentive for parents to send their children to school instead of work.

In relation to health, it offered primary health care to beneficiary households with particular attention to pregnant and nursing women, and children below 5 years old. The focus was on preventive medicine and tailored to some of the main and most common ailments in Mexico. A key component for the promotion of self-care was the active participation of the community. In order to nurture behaviours that reduced health risks and promoted hygiene and better nutrition, it provided training through workshops and talks - explained in the third stage of CCT - that were part of the so called co-responsibilities,<sup>82</sup> envisioned from the beginning of CCT.

#### ***List of health related services under Progresa***

##### **Basic health care package offered by Progresa**

- Basic sanitation for families
- Family planning
- Prenatal care, childbirth and puerperium and the new-born
- Surveillance of nutrition and child growth
- Immunisations
- Management of diarrhoea at home
- Anti-parasitic treatment
- Management of acute respiratory infections
- Prevention and control of pulmonary tuberculosis
- Prevention and control of arterial hypertension and diabetes mellitus
- Accident prevention and initial injury management
- Community training for self-care of health
- Detection and control of uterine cervical cancer

*Source: Progresa, 1999*

In practice, the programme first identified a head of household to deliver the cash and in kind support, which in most cases was the mother. The head of household was also the person in charge of ensuring compliance with the conditionalities. With this, there was a “*recognition of the importance, responsibility and commitment of women as agents for the development of households and to make better use of support from the programme*” (Progresa, 1999: 25).

### **Appendix 3: Main components of Oportunidades**

In terms of cash transfers, it continued its previous support, made some additions and increased the amounts provided. In relation to the nutritional element, it increased its food support and provided £12.35 (\$315 Mexican pesos) plus a compensatory amount of £5 (130 Mexican pesos) to account for the international increase of food prices. It also added a child support component of £4.50 (\$115 Mexican pesos) per household with family members between 0 and 9 years old. It included an elderly support component of £13.52 (\$345 Mexican pesos) per household with family members over 60 years old. In relation to the educational element, it increased scholarship amounts, added support to those in college, and provided a one-off cash transfer of £180 (\$4,599 Mexican pesos) for young students who finished college before turning 22 years old.

***Comparative scholarships Progresa – Oportunidades in pounds sterling***

<b>Item</b>	<b>Progresa</b>	<b>Oportunidades</b>
<b>Scholarships primary school</b>		
1st year (only in communities with less than 2,5000 inhabitants)	-	£6.50
2nd year (only in communities with less than 2,5000 inhabitants)	-	£6.50
3rd year	£3.10	£6.50
4th year	£3.70	£7.60
5th year	£4.90	£9.80
6th year	£6.40	£12.90
<b>Scholarships secondary school</b>		
First year		
Male	£9.40	£18.80
Female	£9.80	£20
Second year		
Male	£9.80	£20
Female	£10.90	£22.10
Third year		
Male	£10.30	£20.90
Female	£11.90	£24.30
<b>Scholarships College</b>		
First year		
Male	-	£31.70
Female	-	£36.40
Second year		

Male	-	£34.10
Female	-	£39
Third year		
Male	-	£36.20
Female	-	£41.30

Source: *Oportunidades*, 2009

In relation to the health element, *Oportunidades* continued the basic health care package initiated with *Progres*a; it expanded the service provision from only rural in 1997 to semi-urban areas in 2001 and then to urban areas in 2003. Also in relation to health, it continued actions to promote health through three mechanisms: training (workshops), provision of information and orientation (visits with the general practitioners), and collective messages tailored to the life cycles of beneficiaries (talks). While the following section discusses the content of these three mechanisms, it is worth emphasising their role advancing the idea of people's responsibility over their living conditions, the development of their human capital and ultimately their capacity to escape poverty.

#### Appendix 4: General topics covered by health self-care workshops

Determinant	Topic	Subtheme
Nutrition	Consumption of food supplements	Undernourishment
		Use of food supplements
	Correct nutrition	Correct nutrition
	Metabolic syndrome	Overweight and obesity
		Diabetes
		Hypertension
		Dyslipidaemias
Sexual and reproductive health	Adolescence and sexuality	Adolescence
		Sexuality
	Infection prevention of sexually transmitted diseases	STDs
		HIV-AIDS
	Family planning	Family planning
	Pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	Pregnancy and maternity without risks
		Childbirth and puerperium
		Nursing
	Male and female climacteric	Male and female climacteric
	Cancer prevention	Cervical cancer

		Breast cancer
		Prostate cancer
Healthy physical environment	Personal hygiene	Oral health
		Personal hygiene
	Basic sanitation at family level	Basic sanitation at family level
	Acute diarrheal diseases	Diarrhoea and serum
		Parasitism
	Accident prevention	Accident prevention
		Basic management of injuries
	Actions in case of natural disasters	Actions in case of natural disasters
	Prevention of contagious diseases	Acute respiratory infections
		Tuberculosis
Diseases transmitted by vectors and others		
Healthy psychosocial environment	Promotion of mental health	Promotion of mental health
		Life skills
	Prevention of addictions	Prevention of addictions
Prevention of violence	Prevention of violence	
Child growth and development	New-born care	New-born care
	Children younger than 1 year old	Children younger than 1 year old
	Children younger than 5 years old	Children younger than 5 years old
	Child development evaluation	Child development evaluation
	Early stimulation	Early stimulation
Diversity, equity and gender	Elderly care	Elderly care
	Care of people with disability	Care of people with disability
	Interculturality and health	Interculturality and health
	Gender and health	Gender and health
Physical activity	Physical activity	Physical activity by age
Right to health	Health services	Health services
		"Seguro Popular"
		Health Insurance "Siglo XXI"
	Vaccinations	Vaccinations

	Organ donation culture	Organ donation culture
Social participation	Social participation	Social participation
<b>Workshops Integral Strategy of Attention to Nutrition (ESIAN by its initials in Spanish)</b>		
Breastfeeding		
Feeding children from 6 months to 2 years of age		
Food and physical activity during pregnancy and breastfeeding		

Source: DOF 2017

## Appendix 5: *Prospera's* budget allocation to scholarships (values expressed in Mexican pesos)

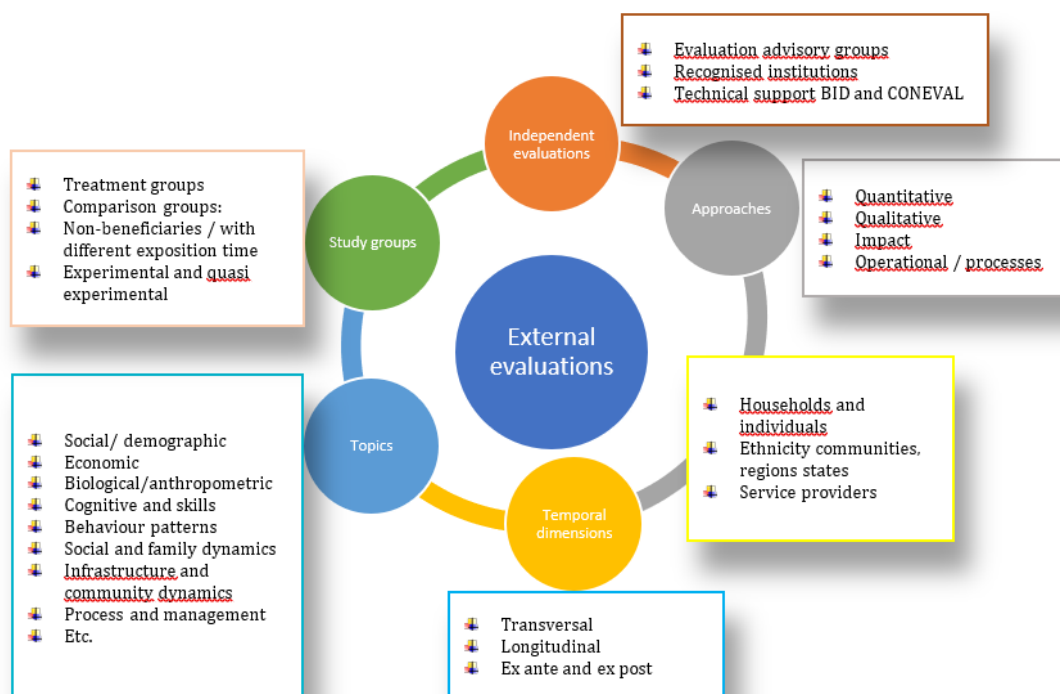
Year	Men	Women*
<b>Primary Education</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup>		\$175
2 <sup>nd</sup>		\$175
3 <sup>rd</sup>		\$175
4 <sup>th</sup>		\$205
5 <sup>th</sup>		\$265
6 <sup>th</sup>		\$350
<b>Secondary Education (junior high school)</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup>	\$515	\$540
2 <sup>nd</sup>	\$540	\$600
3 <sup>rd</sup>	\$570	\$660
<b>CAM (for working / training)</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup>	\$865	\$990
2 <sup>nd</sup>	\$925	\$1,055
3 <sup>rd</sup>	\$980	\$1,120
<b>Middle-higher education (high school)</b>		
10 <sup>th</sup>	\$865	\$990
11 <sup>th</sup>	\$925	\$1,055
12 <sup>th</sup>	\$980	\$1,120
*Amounts in this table are in Mexican pesos - Average exchange rate £1 = \$25.5 Mexican pesos		

Source: Self-elaborated based on information from (*Oportunidades, 2014*)

## Appendix 6: Main sources of information used by external examinations.

Acronym	Name	Year
<b>ENCEL</b>	Survey Evaluation of Households	199, 2000, 2003, 2007
<b>ENCELURB</b>	Survey Evaluation of Rural Households	2002, 2003, 2004, 2009
<b>ENIGH</b>	National Survey of Income and Expenditure of Households	1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012
<b>ENCASEH</b>	Survey of Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households	1997, 2013, 2014
<b>ENLACE</b>	National Evaluation of Academic Achievements in Schools	2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014
<b>EDHUCA</b>	Evaluation of the Project Stimulus for Human Development and Capabilities of Adults	2012
<b>ENNVIH</b>	National Survey of Households Living Standards	2002, 2005-2006, 2009-2012
<b>ECEFO</b>	Survey on Energy Consumption of the Oportunidades' Families	2007
<b>ENSANUT</b>	National Survey of Health and Nutrition	2006, 2012
<b>ENN</b>	National Survey Nutrition	1999
<b>EXCALE</b>	Test for the Quality and Academic Achievement	2008, 2009
<b>ENSA</b>	National Survey of Health	2000

## Appendix 7: Comprehensive evaluation model



Source: (Escobedo, 2011).

## Appendix 8: Multidimensional definition of poverty according to CONEVAL

Levels of poverty	Constitutive elements	Identification of poverty
Economic well-being	Goods and services acquirable through income	<p><b>Welfare line:</b> allows identification of the population that does not have sufficient resources to purchase goods and services required to meet their (food and non-food) needs.</p> <p><b>Minimum welfare line:</b> allows identification of the population that even when using all their income on food purchases, could not acquire the essentials for proper nutrition.</p>



Social rights	Needs of the population in the exercise of their rights for social development, specifically those associated with the indicators referred to in Article 36	<p>In terms of <b>educational backwardness</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Population aged 3-15 years that has not finished secondary education and does not attend school.</li> <li>b) Population born up to 1981 that has not completed primary education.</li> <li>c) Population born after 1982 that has not finished high school.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of <b>access to health services</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Population not affiliated or registered to receive health services by the “<i>Seguro Popular</i>”, and is not entitled to any social security institution.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of <b>access to social security</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Employed and salaried population that does not receive from their employer any health services, paid inability and “<i>SAR</i>” or “<i>Afore</i>”.</li> <li>b) Employed and self-employed population who do not receive as a job benefit or self-recruitment medical services by a public institution of Social Security and “<i>SAR</i>” or “<i>Afore</i>”.</li> <li>c) Population without access to social security for any of the first two criteria, who do not enjoy any retirement or pension, nor have a direct family member within or outside the household with access to social security.</li> <li>d) Population of 65 years and over who do not have access to social security for any of the above criteria nor are in receipt of any social pension programme for seniors.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of <b>quality and living spaces</b>, the population residing in households with at least one of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Most of the floors are made of soil.</li> <li>b) The material of the ceiling is mainly pegboard or debris.</li> <li>c) The material of most of the walls is mud or daub; reeds, bamboo or palm; sheet cardboard, metal or asbestos; or scrap.</li> <li>d) With overcrowding.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of <b>access to basic services in a household</b>, population residing in households with at least one of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The water comes from a well, river, lake, stream, pipe, or, piped water; obtained by hauling from another house, or public key or hydrant.</li> <li>b) They have no drainage, or drain connected to a pipe that goes to a river, lake, sea, canyon or crack.</li> <li>c) They do not have electricity.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of <b>access to food</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Population in households with moderate or severe degree of food insecurity.</li> </ul>
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Territorial context	Aspects that transcend the individual level (which may relate to geographic, social and cultural characteristics, among others.); in particular, those associated with the degree of social cohesion and others considered relevant for social development.	<p>In terms of the <b>degree of social cohesion</b>:</p> <p>a) Measures of social polarization, social networks or economic inequality, which will be measured for specific geographical and territorial areas (city, county, state, or any other one relevant according to the goals, objectives and actions of each social development programme).</p> <p>In terms of <b>access to basic social infrastructure</b>:</p> <p>a) Population in locations that are at a greater distance than three kilometres from a paved road.</p> <p>b) Population in locations without access to sewers and public electrification.</p> <p>c) Population in communities without access to public landfills or any public service of garbage disposal.</p> <p>d) Other relevant social indicators according to the objectives, purposes and actions of each social development programme.</p> <p>e) Others considered relevant for social development.</p>
Multi-dimensional poverty	A person whose income is insufficient to purchase goods and services required to meet their needs	A person that lacks at least one of the following six indicators: sufficient education, access to health services, access to social security, quality and spacious housing, basic services in housing and access to food.

Source: (DOF, 2010)

## Appendix 9: Brief historical review of poverty approaches in Mexico

In 1983, the government published the first National Plan for Development that set the basis of a new approach to development. There the goal was economic stability through *“sound finances by correcting the levels of public expenditure and undertaking a process of economic austerity”* (Trejo et al., 2003: 231). Although there was no clear definition of poverty and the understanding of needs was in relation to subsistence, the plan represented a fundamental change from the previous approach to poverty alleviation. Accordingly, the government started privileging targeted rather than universalised social policies.

It was also at that time that the influence of financial institutions in the fight against poverty became evident. Mexico adhered to the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) following recommendations from the IMF. By 1990’s Mexico transited from SAP to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). PRSP *“are prepared by the member countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders as well as development partners, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund”*, and *“describe the country’s macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs over a three year or longer horizon to promote broad-based growth and reduce poverty.”* (IMF, 2003) Hence, SAP and PRSP were the federal definitions of poverty during that time. (Czarnecki, 2012).

Given that their focus was on reducing fiscal imbalances of the borrowing countries by the provision of loans, they privileged the free-market rationale. As such, for countries like Mexico, the focus was on trade, a production-oriented economy, privatisation and deregulation. Maintaining a balanced economy entailed forcing austerity programmes and thus efficiency of policies. In turn, the focus of social policy was to alleviate absolute understanding of poverty with an emphasis on subsistence needs and because of budget constraints and to increase efficiency, the key for development was targeted social programmes.

Parallel to this development, another international institution started gaining momentum as a counterweight to mainstream approaches to poverty. The early efforts of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) focused social policy on efficiency and rationalisation (Villarespe, 2010). Accordingly, ECLAC based its methodology on a poverty line based on the Normative Food Basket (NFB). It started by calculating the food basket necessary to cover people's nutritional needs, taking into account the predominant consumption habits together with the effective availability of food and their relative prices (CEPAL, 1992). Such cost represents the extreme poverty line. Thereafter, it obtained the moderate poverty line by multiplying the cost of the food basket by a factor of 2 for urban areas and a factor of .75 for rural areas (Trejo et al., 1993). However, by highlighting the consumption habits of one part of the population, ECLAC risked overemphasising some habits over others and as such, emphasising strategies focused on consumption behaviours which is problematic when it comes to understanding the interaction of the satisfaction of needs with the contradictions of personal worth attached to living standards, as analysed in chapter four.

Although during those decades and until the year 2004 there was no official government definition of poverty, each institution and programme had its own measures and lines of poverty. For instance, the Fiscal Coordination Law of 1997 used a line of poverty based on Basic Needs (BN) with a focus on extreme poverty; it was a multidimensional approach to poverty based on five measures: per capita household income, average education level in a household, use of space within a household, availability of sewerage, availability of electricity/fuel to cook. By using a ponderation for each variable and adding the results, and then squaring that result, it established a Global Poverty Rate with a number from -.5 to 1 wherein households between 0 and 1 were considered in extreme poverty (DOF, 1997). The focus of that law was of course on households that fell in that range and the line of poverty was set on the so-called "*extreme poor*". Furthermore, it understood basic needs largely in relation to household infrastructure, but without any consideration of immaterial resources such as time, leisure time, community organisation and distribution of power in society.

## Appendix 10: Topic guides, participant information sheets, participant consent form, agency recruitment information, recruitment survey, recruitment posters.

### Topic Guide<sup>83</sup>

#### *“Explaining experiences of people in material hardship”*

##### Introduction

My name is Gerardo Arriaga and I am a PhD student at the University of Birmingham, which is located in the United Kingdom. Your presence here today is very important and I want to thank you for taking the time and effort to be part of this research. I want to start by providing you with information about the purpose of this research, in order for you to be fully aware of the extent and implications of this research.

We often hear media, politicians and journalists talking about social problems and the economy. However, I’m interested to hear first-hand how people actually live their lives under limited economic resources. That is the reason why I would like to ask you about your day to day life, how you manage to deal with expenses, as well as your relationship with relatives, neighbours, health care providers, teachers and other government institutions.

I am aware that these topics could be very personal and sensitive for you. That is the reason why I want to assure you that all the information you provide me with will be treated with the highest standards of confidentiality. In fact, when I produce the final report of my research, your name and personal data will not be disclosed. Therefore, no one will ever be able to link you or any of your relatives to my research. Furthermore, the information from this interviews that will be used for the report, will not include any real names.

I also want to tell you that you can stop this interview at any time.

##### Part I: BACKGROUND

I’d like to start by asking you some things about your life story

- a) I’d like if you could tell me about what you usually do during the week?
- b) Do you have anything that you like to do more than other things?
- c) Could you please tell me how your childhood was?
- d) How is your life now compared to your childhood?
- e) How did you came to be living here in xx?
- f) Could you tell me about the most significant events that have happened to you in your life?
- g) Could you tell me about events that have had an impact on your economic situation?

<b>Probing</b>
Background / life trajectories / experiences of poverty as a child

<b>Prompts</b>
Household responsibilities (people involved in caring for their children; parents, relatives and neighbours interaction)
Employment (change of jobs, job loss; retirement; unemployment; cut in job hours; lack of jobs; informal economy)
Education (access/non-access; training and qualifications)
Income/finance (salary/rises; benefits; credit; debts)
Health (chronic illness; disability; accidents)
Relationship/partners/breakups/separations/bereavement

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Suggested time</b>
To ease participants into the type of narrative for the interview. To obtain the background in order to understand and analyse the following questions. To weight the context and life history of participants To further understand life events that have impacted on their living conditions.	15 - 25 minutes

## Part II: Alienation from others

I would now like to ask you about how you feel people treat you in different places

Do you feel people treat you differently because of your economic situation?

Have you ever felt uncomfortable or ashamed before other people for not having money?

How are you usually treated by people with authority (health care providers, professors, employers, etc.)

How do you feel when you receive benefits from the *Prospera* programme?

1. Has the receipt of *Prospera* support ever made you feel embarrassed
  - b. What is your opinion about the tasks you are asked to do as part of the *Prospera* programme?
  - c. Have you ever felt misrepresented by the programme?
  - d. Have you ever felt ashamed or diminished by the tasks you are asked to do as part of the programme conditionalities?

<b>Probing</b>
Issues of disrespect, social cohesion / shame / stigma / interaction with figures of authority / power dynamics / internalisation of benefits / personal aspirations / personal thoughts about present and future

<b>Prompts</b>
Participation in society
The clothes you wear
The places you visit
The things you buy
An inability to participate in social events
An inability to get things for your loved ones on special occasions
Inviting people over to your home

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To further understand their perception of personal value as attached to their economic circumstances To deepen knowledge about people's subjective experience of their material restrictions	15-20 minutes

**Part III: Alienation from oneself**

How would you define success?

What do you think is needed to be successful?

I would like now to ask you a little more about your life

What do you think about your living conditions?

If at work	If not at work
Q 9 What do you think about your results at work?	Q 9 What do you think about your performance in your day to day activities?
Q 10 How do you usually feel at your work place?	Q 10 How do you usually feel during the day?
Q 11 How does your boss/ work colleagues treat you?	Q 11 Can you describe to me how your relation with neighbours is?
Q 12 Can you describe to me how your relation with neighbours is?	Q 12 How do your neighbours treat you?
Q 13 How do your neighbours treat you?	

<b>Probing</b>
Control of living circumstances / feelings of self-worth / empowerment

<b>Prompts</b>
Personal satisfaction/dissatisfaction (of work, of personal achievements, of relationship with other people)
Cohesion in society (how identified / empathetic they feel with other people)
Personal feeling of worthiness

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To observe people's feeling of accomplishment in life as well as factors affecting their relationship with themselves and with other people. To further understand the elements prone to interaction or division	15-20 minutes

#### **Part IV: The logic of "deservingness"**

I would like now to ask your opinion about current issues in society

Why do you think there are people living on the streets?

- a. What do you think about them?
- b.

What do you think is the difference between them and you?

What do you think is the main difference between your family and that of your neighbours?

<b>Probing</b>
Empathy / disapproval / values / effort / sacrifice

<b>Prompts such as</b>
People on the street as less hard working
Lack of effort and vision of worst off people
Economic condition as a result of one's own decisions

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>

<p>To further understand the weight attached to effort as key to economic conditions</p> <p>To deepen understanding about how people approach other people living in similar or worse off economic conditions</p> <p>To approach people's understanding of their identity and that of their colleagues</p>	15 – 20 minutes
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**Part V: Alienation from resources and opportunities**

Do you feel you have control over decisions affecting your life?

- a. How does that make you feel?
- b.

Why do you think there are people who have so much and people who have so little?

How do you feel about your accomplishments in life?

<b>Probing</b>
Use of time / free time / control over living conditions

<b>Prompts such as</b>
Education of your children, access to better paid jobs, access to credit, your leisure time, holidays, the healthcare you receive, the housing conditions where you live, etc.)
Unfair system / people don't work hard enough
Feelings of dissatisfaction

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
<p>To understand what people feel overwhelms them and the extent to which they are able to exercise their own agency.</p> <p>To understand what they think they are supposed to do but may feel are not doing and the weight they put on structural vis-à-vis personal circumstances.</p>	15 – 20 minutes

**PART VI: Prospera**

How does *Prospera* work?

What are your benefits?

What are your responsibilities?



What are your thoughts about conditionalities?

What are your thoughts about *Prospera*?

How has *Prospera* made a difference in your life?

How has being part of *Prospera* impacted on your interactions with other people (community, household, practitioners)?

<b>Probing</b>
Conditionalities / use of resources to comply with <i>Prospera</i> / feelings and thoughts about <i>Prospera</i> / interaction with other beneficiaries / interaction with practitioners and programme representatives

<b>Prompts</b>
Advantages and disadvantages of <i>Prospera</i>
Treatment from programme representatives
Costs attached to complying
Use of benefits - purpose

### For spokespeople

How has being a spokesperson impacted in your interaction with beneficiaries / programme officials?  
What has it meant to you to be a spokesperson?

<b>Probing</b>
Social interactions / costs of being a spokesperson / advantages – disadvantages of being a spokesperson

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To understand how <i>Prospera</i> works To understand people's take about <i>Prospera</i> To understand the burdens of <i>Prospera</i> in terms of time, income, effort To understand people's interaction with programme representatives and with other beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries	15 – 20 minutes

### Part VII: Closure

What are your hopes for the future? Do you think your aspirations have changed over time?  
Could you tell me the aspects of your life that you are proudest of?

Purpose	Time
To detach interviewees from any negative feeling To understand interviewees' thoughts and expectations about the future	15 – 20 minutes

**PART VIII: End of Interview**

Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with me today. Hearing about your experiences and your views is very important for our project.

So before I go is there anything else that you think is important that we should consider when we are making our report?

So thank you once again for taking part in a research interview for our study. The information that you have provided will be very useful when I put together my final report. Just to remind you we won't be using your real name anywhere in the report.

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**What is the purpose of the study?**

This is a research I'm undertaking as part of my PhD studies. The goal of this project is to improve our understanding of a life under material hardship. This investigation will be relevant to further understand how people experience poverty and social exclusion in Mexico.

**Who is organising or sponsoring the research? / Who is funding and conducting the study?**

This research is supported by the University of Birmingham, with the approval of the ethical committee. It is sponsored by the National Commission of Science and Technology (CONACYT) of Mexico

**What will I have to do?**

The study involves interviewing 40 people from the State of Veracruz, Mexico, as well as 4 interviews with practitioners and researchers. I will also undertake focus groups with some of the people interviewed that agree to take part. The idea behind these interviews is to learn more about people's experiences of a life under material hardship and their perspectives on issues of social exclusion and discrimination. The questions are focused on daily life events, past and present experiences and expectations for the future. This is why your participation is so important for this project!

**Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to take part of this project because I want to know the opinions and experience of people over 18 years old who are beneficiaries of the *Prospera* programme and live under material constraints. Therefore, I am really interested to hear about your experience as a beneficiary of the *Prospera* programme and what that means to you and your family. As you can see, your opinion is key for my project and your ideas and support will be very appreciated and valued.

### **Do I have to take part?**

The first thing you need to know, is that your participation on this project is completely voluntary. You are by no means obliged to take part in this project. In fact, you can withdraw at any time without giving any explanation with no consequences whatsoever.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to be on a face-to-face interview, which will last between 1 hour and 1 hour 45 minutes within the facilities of the local public school XX. During the interview, you will sign a consent form where you agree to be interviewed. The interview will be voice-recorded, and you will be able to pause or stop the interview at any time.

In the interview, I will ask you to think back about your life story and your personal experience of living in material hardship, as well as the implications of that for you and your family members. I would also like you to tell me about how you find your relation with neighbours and friends and the way you feel treated by them. I am also interested to know about your opinion on the *Prospera* programme, what it means for you and your family and the treatment you receive from civil servants during the health visits, as well as how your family members are treated by other public institutions.

I want to remind you that all the information that you provide with will be strictly confidential and no one, except for me and my supervisors, will have access to your personal data or that of your relatives.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you can request a break and we can re-start the interview later on. However, if you decide not to continue you can withdraw from this project at any time.

### **What if there is a problem?**

I understand that talking about personal issues can be a difficult task and might even sound like a difficult thing to do. However, the whole research project has been approved by the ethical panel review at the University of Birmingham, which is a guarantee of the quality of the research. Furthermore, the Centre for Multiple Attention together with the local school XX have a team of experts working on emotional and psychological support should you need or want to take advantage of it.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All your personal information as well as all the information you provide me with during the interview will be stored with the highest standards of security according to the University of Birmingham regulations and the Data Protection Act. Furthermore, no one outside the research team formed by myself and my two supervisors will have access to your information. Therefore, you can rest assured that your confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed entirely. Additionally, all the personal data will in fact be erased in accordance to data sharing practices.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

All the information collected during the interviews will be analysed and put together as part of my PhD thesis. The results will be available at the Library Repository of the University of Birmingham.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For further information you can always contact me on:  And on my mobile phone number:

## Participation Consent Form

Tick the boxes below if you consent with the following statements

1. I confirm that I have read and fully understood the information sheet about this study. I confirm that I have had enough time to think about the information and taking part in this interview and ask questions that have all been answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation in this project is entirely voluntarily and that there was no pressure to take part in it. I also confirm that I am aware that I can withdraw from this project at any time and without providing any explanation, and that withdrawing will have no impact on the benefits and services I receive.
3. I understand that all my personal data will be safely kept and that it will not be used for any other purposes but for this research and articles that may derive from it. I also understand that my personal information and that of my relatives will not be disclosed to any third parties.
4. I understand that my personal data will not be disclosed at any time and that once the project has concluded, the records of my personal information will be destroyed.

Please sign to indicate that you have decided to participate voluntarily as part of this research project and that you have fully understood the extent of this research as well as what it is expected from you. You will be provided with a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Practitioner Information sheet

### What is the purpose of the study?

This is a research I'm undertaking as part of my PhD studies. The goal of this project is to improve our understanding of a life under material hardship. This investigation will be relevant to further understand how people experience poverty and social exclusion in Mexico.

### Who is organising or sponsoring the research? / Who is funding and conducting the study?

This research is supported by the University of Birmingham, with the approval of the ethical committee at that University. It is sponsored by the National Commission of Science and Technology (CONACYT) of Mexico.

### What will I have to do?

The study involves interviewing 40 people from the State of Veracruz, Mexico, as well as 4 interviews with practitioners and researchers. I will also undertake focus groups with some of the people interviewed that agree to take part. The idea behind these interviews is to learn more about people's experiences of a life under material hardship and their perspectives on issues of social exclusion and

discrimination. The questions are focused on daily live events, past and present experiences and expectations for the future. This is why your participation is so important for this project!

### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to take part of this project because I want to know your insight about working with people living in poverty. I am interested to hear about the type of job you perform, your opinion about the impact of what you do on people in material hardship, as well as your perception about what you think poverty means for people.

Your opinion, ideas, comments and input is very important for my research and will help to to investigate what is to be done and better understand poverty.

### **Do I have to take part?**

The first thing you need to know, is that your participation on this project is completely voluntary. You are by no means obliged to take part in this project. In fact, you can withdraw at any time without giving any explanation and with no consequences whatsoever.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to be in a face-to-face interview, which will last between 1 hour and 1 hour 45 minutes within the facilities of the local public school XX. During the interview, you will sign a consent form where you agree to be interviewed. The interview will be voice-recorded, and you will be able to pause or stop the interview at any time.

In the interview, I will ask you to brief me on about what you do and how you do it. I am particularly interested to hear about your opinions and ideas about people living in poverty, what you think are the limitations and barriers they face, how you think they deal with them and what in your opinion they could be doing. Also I am interested to know your insights into how they use the services you provide and other services to which they have access.

I want to remind you that all the information that you provide with will be strictly confidential and no one, except for me and my supervisors, will have access to your personal data or that of your relatives.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you can request a break and we can re-start the interview later on. However, if you decide not to continue you can withdraw from this project at any time.

### **What if there is a problem?**

I understand that talking about the job you do can be a difficult task However, the whole research project has been approved by the ethical panel review at the University of Birmingham, which is for you a guarantee of the quality of the research.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All your personal information as well as all the information you provide me with during the interview will be stored with the highest standards of security according to the University of Birmingham regulations and the Data Protection Act. Furthermore, no one outside the research team formed by myself and my two supervisors will have access to your information. Therefore, you can rest assured that your confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed entirely. Additionally, all the personal data will in fact be erased in accordance to data sharing practices.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

All the information collected during the interviews will be analysed and put together as part of my PhD thesis. It might also be used to produce additional articles, blog entries or online input. The results will be available at the Library Repository of the University of Birmingham.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For further information, you can always contact me on: [REDACTED] And on my mobile phone number: [REDACTED]

## **Topic Guide for Practitioners**

### **Topic Guide**

#### ***“Explaining experiences of people in material hardship”***

#### **Introduction**

My name is Gerardo Arriaga and I am a PhD student at the University of Birmingham, which is located in the United Kingdom. Your presence here today is very important and I want to thank you for taking the time and effort to be part of this research. I want to start by providing you with information about the purpose of this research, in order for you to be fully aware of the extent and implications of this research.

We often hear media, politicians and journalists talking about social problems and the economy. However, I’m interested to hear first-hand how people actually live their lives under limited economic resources. For this research I will be interviewing people who are beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the *Prospera* programme in order to have a first-hand understanding of a life in poverty. I will also be interviewing practitioners such as you in order to capture the importance of the job you do and the impact it has on them. I’m particularly interested to hear your insights about pressing topics related to poverty alleviation and inequality, as well as your thoughts about the *Prospera* programme and its impact on people.

I want to assure you that all the information you provide me with will be treated with the highest standards of confidentiality. In fact, when I produce the final report of my research, your name and personal data will not be disclose. Therefore, no one will ever be able to link you or any of your relatives to my research. Furthermore, the information from this interviews that will be used for the report, will not include any real names.

I also want to tell you that you can stop this interview at any time.

#### **Part I: BACKGROUND**

I'd like to start by asking you some things about the work you do

- a) Could you tell me about when did you start working here?
- b) What is it that you do and what are your responsibilities?
- c) How often do you have contact with people in economic hardship?
- d) Could you please describe to me how it is when you provide them with XX service?

<b>Probing</b>
Background / general thoughts about tasks, responsibilities / general interactions with people in poverty

<b>Prompts such as</b>
Employment (change of jobs, job loss; retirement; unemployment; cut in job hours; lack of jobs; informal economy)
Education (access/non-access; training and qualifications)
Relationship with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the <i>Prospera</i> programme

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Suggested time</b>
To ease participants into the type of narrative for the interview. To obtain the background in order to understand and analyse the following questions. To weight the context and live history of participants To further understand practitioner's interaction with people in material hardship.	15 - 25 minutes

**Part II Alienation from others**

I would now like to ask you about your personal opinion about the job you do

What do you think is the main achievement of the *Prospera* programme ?

Do you think beneficiaries take advantage of the opportunities opened to them?

How do you think beneficiaries feel after receiving benefits from the government?

What is your opinion about the tasks they are asked to do as part of the *Prospera* programme ?

- e. Do you think the *Prospera* programme properly represents the interest and needs of beneficiaries?

How would you define success?

What do you think beneficiaries of the *Prospera* programme need to be successful?

<b>Probing</b>
Functioning of <i>Prospera</i> / general thoughts about people in poverty – beneficiaries of <i>Prospera</i> / perception about the idea of success

<b>Prompts</b>
Activities, behaviours, attitudes and aspirations of people in poverty
Effort required to succeed
Perceived level of efficiency of the <i>Prospera</i> programme

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To further understand their perception of personal value as attached to economic circumstances To deepen knowledge about practitioners' perceptions of <i>Prospera's</i> efficiency	15-20 minutes

**Part III: Alienation from others and the logic of “deservingness”**

I would like now to ask your opinion about current issues in society

Why do you think there are people living on the streets?  
b. What do you think about them?

What do you think is the difference between them and beneficiaries?

What do you think is the key to understand the lives of people in poverty?

<b>Probing</b>
Perceptions and opinions about poverty – causes of poverty / government support rationale /

<b>Prompts such as</b>
People on the street as less hard working
Lack of effort and vision of worse off people



Economic condition as a result of one's own decisions

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To further understand the weight attached to effort as key to economic conditions To deepen understanding about how people approach other people living on similar or worst off economic conditions	15 – 20 minutes

**Part IV: Alienation from resources**

Do you feel beneficiaries have control over decisions affecting their lives?

Why do you think there are people who have so much and people who have so little?  
What do you think is needed to end poverty?

What are the barriers people in poverty face?

What in your opinion are the advantages and disadvantages of *Prospera*?

<b>Probing</b>
Material conditions / structure-agency / impact of <i>Prospera</i> / perceived efforts of beneficiaries

<b>Prompts such as</b>
Unfair system / people don't work hard enough
Feelings of dissatisfaction

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Time</b>
To capture practitioners' views on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries To identify if they place different labels on people based on their economic circumstances or effort in life. To understand the weight they attach to the <i>Prospera</i> programme as key to separate hard working from not hard working people	15 – 20 minutes

**PART V: WRAP UP**

Do you think beneficiaries' aspirations in live have changed as a result of the programme?

**PART VI: End of Interview**

Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with me today. Hearing about your experiences and your views is very important for our project.

So before I go is there anything else that you think is important that we should consider when we are making our report?

So thank you once again for taking part in a research interview for our study. The information that you have provided will be very useful when I put together my final report. Just to remind you we won't be using your real name anywhere in the report.

**Participation Consent Form for practitioners**

Tick the boxes below if you consent with the following statements

- 1. I confirm that I have read and fully understood the information sheet about this study. I confirm that I have had enough time to think about the information and taking part in this interview and ask questions that have all been answered satisfactorily.
- 2. I understand that my participation in this project is entirely voluntarily, and that there was no pressure to take part in it. I also confirm that I am aware that I can withdraw from this project at any time and without providing any explanation, and that withdrawing will have no impact on the benefits and services I receive.
- 3. I understand that all my personal data will be safely kept and that it will not be used for any other purposes but for this research and articles that may derive from it. I also understand that my personal information and that of my relatives will not be disclosed to any third parties.
- 4. I understand that my personal data will not be disclosed at any time and that once the project has concluded the records of my personal information will be destroyed.

Please sign to indicate that you have decided to participate voluntarily as part of this research project and that you have fully understood the extent of this research as well as what it is expected from you. You will be provided with a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

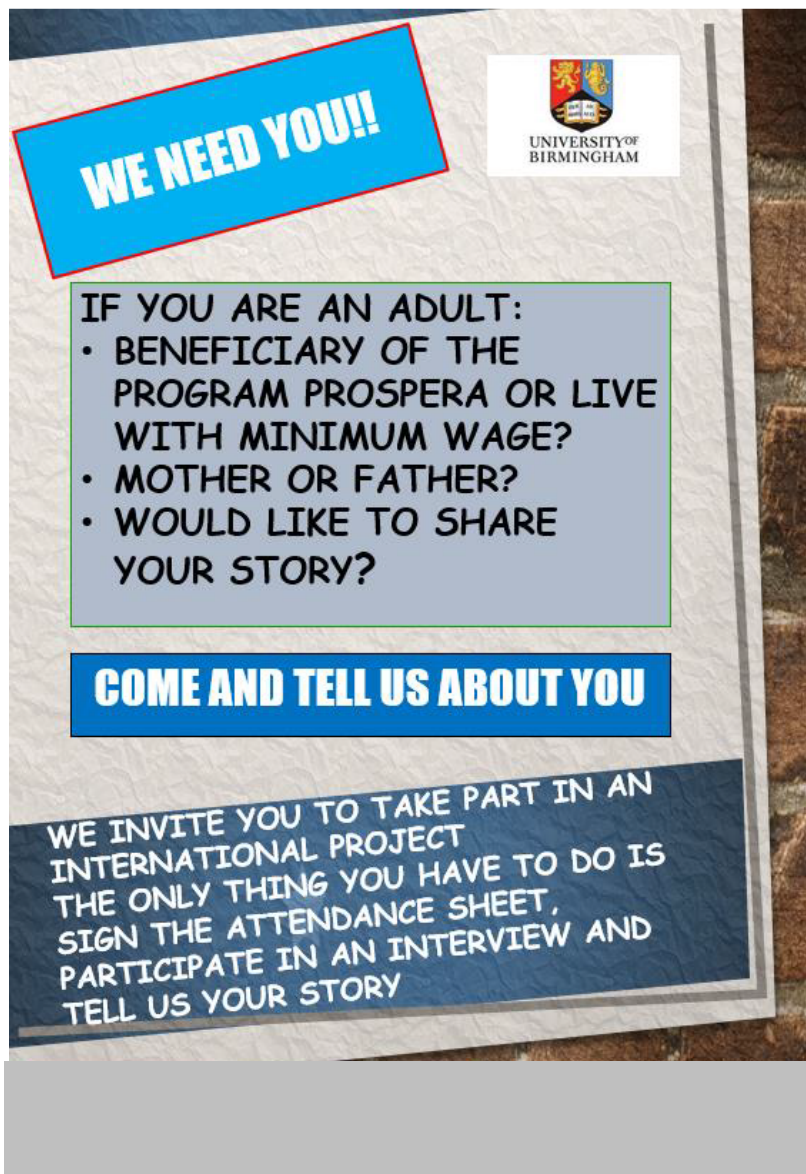
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Recruitment Poster translated into English



## Appendix 11: Key themes of the analysis

Original themes	Deleted themes	Added themes
Work	Child care	Navigation of unsatisfied needs
Income / finances	Contradictory consciousness	Household management of resources

Time (leisure, work, household, <i>Prospera</i> )	Interactions at work	Symbolic violence
Benefits	Negation/distancing	Asymmetries of power
Conditionalities	Separations/bereavement	"Faenas"
Sacrifices and efforts	Opinions about people better off	"Voluntary" donations
Health (chronic illness; disability; accidents)	Political implications of <i>Prospera</i>	"Othering"
Relationships/partners	Opinions about the government	Shaming
Education (access/non-access; training and qualifications)	Corruption	Interactions with non-beneficiaries
Social dynamics (community, household)	Cultural / ethical diversity in the communities	Local inequalities
Access to resources (electricity, running water, transport)		

## Appendix 12: Additional questions for promoters of *Prospera*

### **Prospera**

What are your tasks as a promoter?

How often do you have contact with beneficiaries?

What do you think is your impact on beneficiaries?

What type of interactions do you have with beneficiaries?

What are the benefits of *Prospera*?

How does it work?

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages?

<b>Probing</b>
Functioning of promoters / tasks / interactions / scholarships / food supplies / school supplies / specific functioning / setbacks - advantages

<b>Prompts</b>
Particular interactions between promoters and beneficiaries

Conditions attached to <i>Prospera</i> ?
Absences allowed / discounts / suspension / withdrawal

Purpose	Time
To understand the specific role of promoters To understand the type of dynamics that <i>Prospera</i> promotes with its representatives on the ground To understand their perception about beneficiaries To understand their opinion about <i>Prospera</i>	10 to 15 minutes

### Poverty

How does *Prospera* understand poverty?

What in your words is it that *Prospera* does to alleviate poverty?

Why do you think poverty in Mexico is still very high?

Why do you think beneficiaries of *Prospera* need to escape poverty?

<b>Probing</b>
Targeting / line of poverty / measures / definition / “deservingness” logic /

Purpose	Time
To understand how the programme approaches poverty To understand programme representatives’ discourses of poverty	10 to 15 minutes

### Compensations

What is the process to re-admit someone who has been withdrawn from the programme?

What do beneficiaries need to get their benefits back?

What does *Prospera* do to facilitate that process?

<b>Probing</b>
Criteria / right to audience / lawyer / time frame / requisites / re-evaluation

Purpose	Time
To understand the type of actions implemented by <i>Prospera</i> on the ground to facilitate compensations for wrong deductions / withdrawals	10 to 15 minutes

### Appendix 13: The twelve steps of thematic framework analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data started with the use of thematic summaries for the process of data reduction (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 202) which is a thematic analysis. It identified key themes based on the literature review and particularly the first draft of the theory of alienation in poverty. This allowed qualitative data to be sorted into analytical concepts using cross-sectional analysis (Mason, 2002). Then, with the support of annotated transcripts, it was possible to organise data on specific themes and categories.

However, while coding and categorising, new categories arose that in turn meant approaching data dialectically, that is in constant flux and part of how people make sense of their reality and context. That is, rejecting a *prima-facie* common sense approach of looking at social dynamics from the vantage point of causation and instead understanding the internal relations among themes and categories analysing abstractions and contradictions that manifest in reality.

The use of the qualitative analysis software (CAQDAS) Atlas.ti facilitated the thematic framework analysis. Accordingly, a thematic framework analysis is “used to classify and organize data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. As such, each study has a distinct thematic framework comprising a series of main themes, subdivided by a succession of related subtopics. These evolve and are refined through familiarization with the raw data and cross-sectional labelling” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 220). In practice, it entailed familiarisation with the raw data through an iterative process of revising research questions, hypothesis, sampling techniques and the theoretical framework in order to detect gaps while at the same time contextualise responses. This step was essential in identifying constantly arising themes that permitted to develop an index based on the literature and the theoretical framework of alienation. In other words, applying the overarching framework to the raw data through the process of indexing (Richards and Richards, 1994).

The following step was to sort and group themes to place them within the overarching framework of alienation. To that end, Atlas.ti facilitated sorting data by content electronically, through

the elaboration of a matrix that narrowed the focus per subject while maintaining data in context. After the initial process came several iterations of data classification, indexing and analysis to clear and sort the data. Additionally, this allowed the refining of categories and classification of data to broader abstracted units.

The next step was to better define the particular typologies of alienation by unraveling the interactions among phenomena of a life in poverty. At that point, the three levels of alienation had gained terrain both theoretically and analytically in light of research findings. Thus, assigning data to the corresponding typology and specific dimensions proposed meant putting in motion the theory of alienation through the voices of research interviewees.

Then, with a provisional typology, it was possible to detect patterns within it to then position data into subgroups. Therefore, by revisiting data and locating them in those particular dimensions it was possible to verify associations and their internal relations. In turn, this paved the way for developing explanations of those internal relations and the thenceforth-visible contradictions of people's experiences of poverty with regard to welfare provision.